



The Poems of Propertius

Translated by Ronald Musker



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Translated and edited by
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Book I

The Book of Cynthia

I.1 In Thrall to Cynthia

Cynthia was first; with those eyes of hers she took me—
Poor captive, untouched before by passion's contagion.
Then Love cast down the steadfast pride of my gaze,
And, his foot on my neck, abased my head.
He has taught me, outrageous God, a hatred of girls
Who withhold their favours, and plunged my life in chaos.
Now a year has passed without my madness abating,
And yet I am still obliged to endure
The scowls of the Gods.

Milanion, who shirked no hardship, Tullus, tamed
The ferocious heart of cruel Atalanta;
He wandered distraught through Mount Parthenium's glades,
And came face to face with the shaggy beasts of the wild;
Then, overcome by a wound from Hylaeus' club,
On Arcady's crags he groaned in his pain.
And so he mastered his swift-foot girl; such power
Belongs to prayers and services offered for love.
But for me the God is slow; he invents no devices,
And even forgets to follow his old
Familiar ways.

And you who pretend to drag the moon from the sky,
And labour at rites on magical altars, come!
Induce in my love, I charge you, a change of heart;
Yes, make her cheeks still paler than mine.
Then I'd believe in the power of your witches' chants
To constrain the stars and rivers to go
Wherever you lead.

And you, my friends, since now it is late to recall
A fallen man, seek aid for a mind disordered.
I will bravely stand the knife and the savage cautery
If only you'll let my resentment speak.
Then take me far away through distant lands
And through distant seas by a route no woman
Will ever trace.

But you to whose prayers the Gods give ready ear,
Stay, and safe in your love go hand in hand.

Me my Venus torments with bitter nights
And Love, never idle, grants no rest.
Avoid, I warn you, this evil; let each of you cleave
To the one he holds dear, nor change an accustomed love.
But whoever is slow to heed my admonition
Will recall, alas, with what depth of sorrow
These words of mine!

1.2 Away with Finery!

Why, dear, do you love to go out with your hair arranged
In the latest style and besprinkled with Eastern perfumes?
To parade in filmy ripples of Coän silk
And set yourself off with exotic adornments?
Such purchased graces ruin the charms of nature
And let no part of you glow with its own true light.
Believe me, they're futile—these arts for improving your looks;
Love goes naked and has no time
For contrivers of beauty.

See what colours the lovely earth brings forth;
How the ivy is fairest left to its own devices,
And the arbutus grows at its best in a lonely hollow,
How, uninstructed, the waters know their channels,
The shore's mosaic of pebbles allures our eyes;
And the birds sing all the sweeter song
For having no art.

It was not by fashion's tricks that Phoebe and her sister
Set Castor and Pollux on fire; nor thus that, of old,
Marpessa brought strife, by the banks of her father's river,
To Idas her husband and covetous Phoebus.
And Hippodamia by no false glitter attracted
The Phrygian bridegroom who carried her off
In his foreign chariot.

Theirs was a beauty owing no debt to jewels,
A colour as pure as Apelles used in his pictures;
Not all eagerness they, wherever they went,
To pick up lovers; their modest ways
Sufficed to grace them.

I no longer fear that you rate me at less than those others;
A girl who pleases one lover has graces enough.
And to you especially Phoebus has given song
And no less gladly the Muse her lyre;
Your winning ways have a charm that is all their own;
No gift you lack to gain the favour
Of Minerva or Venus.

And so you will always be the dearest thing
In my life—if only you'd tire of all
That wretched finery!

1.3 A Late Homecoming

As I looked at you lying there, Cynthia, I thought
Of a girl from Cnossos drowsing upon the shore
That Theseus' receding ship had left a desert;
I thought of Andromeda, daughter of Cepheus, freed
From rocky durance and plugged in sleep;
Of a maenad, wearied out by her ceaseless dancing,
Sunk in the grass where the River Apidanus flows:
So gentle a calm you breathed, your hand
Hardly propping your head.

I had trailed home steps bemused with copious wine,
The link-boys brandishing torches, the night far spent,
And now essayed, not yet bereft of my senses,
To approach and lean softly against her bed.
The twofold fire of Love and Wine possessed me;
Relentless Gods, they urged me on either side:
Let me lightly slide my arm round her prostrate form;
Then seize her and kiss her and take her by force of arms.
Yet, dreading the fierce upbraidings I knew too well,
I did not dare to disturb her rest;
And so I stayed fast fixed with eyes intent,
Like Argus staring in fascination
At **Io** the strange-horned.

Now I removed the chaplet from my head,
And as I fitted it, Cynthia, round your temples,
I tidied—with what delight!—your tumbled locks.
Now covertly in the hollow of your hand
I tried to plant apples; but all my gifts were lavished
On thankless sleep, and away they rolled
Down the slope of your breast.

And when at times you stirred in your sleep and sighed,
My credulous heart stood still at the empty sign
In dread that your dreams were fraught with unknown horrors,
Or that someone was trying by force to make you
Unwillingly his.

Then, though her light would have lingered, the busy moon
Unclosed, as she passed by the parted window-shutters,
With her subtle rays my Cynthia's sleep-calm eyes,

Who, leaning in bed on one elbow, cried :
'Has another's rebuff thrust you out of the door now bolted
Against you and brought you back at last to my bed?
Where, to my grief, have you spent the long night-hours
That were mine? Now the time of stars is over
You come to me listless !

'If only, my shameless lover, you had to spend
Such long-drawn nights as you force on wretched me !
For now, to stay the approach of sleep, I wove
With purple thread ; now, weary, sang to the lyre.
Then at times, forlorn, I softly made my plaint
That in other arms you so often dally.
Till, amid my tears at this, my final thought,
I sank subdued as sleep now brushed me
With grateful wing.'

1.4 One Love for Ever

Why, Bassus, by praising all those other girls,
Must you try to change me and make me leave my loved one?
Why not rather let me alone to spend
Whatever of life is still to follow
In a bondage I'm used to?

Although your praises should conjure up the beauty
Of Antiope, Nycteus' child, or Spartan Hermione,
Or whoever else the age of fair women brought forth,
Cynthia still would strip them of their fame.
Much less, competing with beauties of light account,
Though hostile the judge, could she ever suffer
The shame of defeat.

Yet, Bassus, her looks are the smallest part of my madness;
For greater reasons I'm happy to die of love:
Highborn colouring; elegance sprung from skill
In many arts; and then the joys
The quilt keeps secret.

The more you strive to unloose our love, the more
Shall we, who have pledged our faith, frustrate you.
You will not escape unscathed; this girl will know
And, mad with anger, will be no silent enemy.
Never again will she trust me in your company,
Or seek it herself, of your wrong forever mindful.
In her rage she'll revile you to all the other girls;
At no single door, alas, will you find a welcome;
Nor is there any altar or sacred stone,
However humble, at which she will fail
To pour out her grievance.

The wrong that tries my Cynthia most of all
Is to be despoiled of love, her charms left idle,
And especially this love of mine. And so, I pray,
May she always remain; may nothing she does
Be a theme for my plaint!

1.5 A Warning to a Would-be Rival

Put an end, my envious friend, to your tiresome talk,
And let Cynthia and me proceed on our present course.
What do you want, you madman? To share my frenzy?
Unhappy wretch, you rush upon fearful ills;
You drag your feet through unimagined fires;
And whatever poisons come from Thessaly,
You drink them down.

She is not to be compared to your light o' loves;
It is not her way to be mildly angry.
But if by chance she does not spurn your prayers,
How many thousand troubles will she bring you!
She'll leave you no sleep nor allow your eyes to range.
Unique indeed is her power to bind
The fiercest men.

How often then, disdained, will you run to my door,
Your boastful words all choked by your sobbing;
And as you shudder and tremble and sadly weep,
Your haggard face will proclaim your loss of heart,
While the words you need, poor wretch, to express your sorrow
Are not to be found, for you will not know
Who you are or where.

Then you must learn how hard is my loved one's service,
What it's like, shut out, to have to go back home;
And assuredly you will not then so often wonder
At my pallor or why my form has shrunk
To nothing at all.

In making love your nobility cannot help you;
To ancestral portraits love will never yield.
But only let her detect a trace of guilt
And how quickly your vaunted name will turn
To a breath of scandal!

Nor, in response to your pleas, could I offer comfort;
Even for my own affliction I have no cure.
Partners we then should be in love and in misery,
Our only course to pour out our griefs
On each other's shoulders.

So Gallus, make no trial of my Cynthia's power.
If she comes when asked, dire retribution
Is bound to follow.

1.6 Dedication to Love

I am not afraid, my Tullus, to learn with you
The Adriatic's moods, or to spread my sails
On Aegean waters; yes, with you I could climb
Rhipsean mountains and overstep
The realm of Memnon.

But the words of a girl who clings to me hold me back,
Her urgent entreaties, her ever changing colour.
All night long she shrills a fiery refrain,
And declares there can be no Gods if I desert her.
She denies she is mine any more and loads me with threats,
Like a girl dismayed that her lover should fail
To respond to her love.

I cannot endure such complaints for a single hour;
To hell with the man who makes love without true feeling!
What use to visit learned Athens or see
The ancient riches of Asia if, when I sail,
Cynthia hurls at me bitter reproaches and leaves
The marks on my face of impassioned hands,
Declaring she owes my kisses to the adverse wind,
And that nothing's so cruel in all the world
As a faithless man?

But you must strive to surpass your uncle's honours,
To restore to Rome's allies their old forgotten rights;
For in your life there has been no place for loving,
Your country in arms your only care.
And may that Boy-God never bring you such labours
As these of mine, or all the troubles
My tears have known.

Let me, whom fortune always meant to sink low,
Die, as I live, in ignoble ways.
Many have readily died in a lifelong love:
Let the earth as it covers me count me one of these.
I was not born for praise or to carry arms;
Fate ordained that I should serve
In the ranks of Love.

But whether, where wanton Ionia stretches her borders,
Or Pactolus tinges the Lydian ploughlands with gold,
You traverse the land on foot or the sea by oar,
You will be one of the welcome rulers.
And if there should come an hour when you think of me,
Be certain then that harsh is the star
Under which I live.

1.7 The Power of Love Poetry

While you, my Ponticus, tell of the city of Cadmus—
Of Thebes, and the dolorous clash of fraternal arms,
And contend—so may I be happy!—with Homer the champion
(If only Fate deals gently with your songs!),
I urge my usual theme of love, and look
For a way to prevail with that cruel girl.
And against my natural bent I am forced to serve
My sorrows and spend my youth complaining
Of bitter days.

This is my way of life and this my fame;
For this I want my poems to win renown.
May they praise me, Ponticus, only for having pleased
An accomplished girl and endured her unjust threats;
And may neglected lovers in after times
Attentively read me and profit by knowing
The troubles I bore.

If the Boy-God strikes you too with unfailing bow
(How I wish he had not used it to injure me!)
You will sadly deplore that your Camps and your Seven Hosts
Lie uselessly mute in eternal dust.
And vainly will you long to write bland verses;
Belated Love will proffer nothing
Towards a song.

Then will you often admire me, no mean poet,
And rank me above the other writers of Rome.
Young men will never stand silent by my tomb;
'Great singer', they'll say, 'of our passions, there you lie!'
Mind, in your pride, that you do not scorn my songs;
Love coming late will often exact
A heavy toll.

1.8A She Proposes to Leave Him for Another

Are you mad, then? Does not your care for me hold you back?
Or am I of less account than icy Illyria?
Does your friend, whoever he is, seem worth so much
That leave me you must and go, whatever the weather?
Have you courage to lie in a comfortless ship and listen
To the muffled roar of the furious ocean?
Can you, Cynthia, tread with tender foot the rime
That will lie in your path, and endure such snows
As you've never seen?

I wish the days of winter weather were doubled,
The sailors idle, waiting for the Pleiads to rise;
That your cable may never be loosed from the Tyrrhene shore,
Nor my prayers dispersed on the hostile air.
May I never see these adverse winds abate
When your ship will put out to sea and be borne away,
And leave me rooted here to the empty shore,
Calling often with clenched fists raised
On your heartlessness.

But whatever, my faithless one, you deserve of me,
I pray that the sea-nymphs may not frown on your voyage:
When, with fortune to favour your oars, the Ceraunian Rocks
Are passed, may Oricos then receive you
With tranquil waters.

For, love of my life, no girl shall ever entice me
To leave your threshold and cease my lamenting;
Nor shall I fail to question the bustling sailors:
'Tell me', I'll say, 'in what port is my girl detained?'
And I'll make it known that though she may go to live
In lands far distant to East or West
She will still be mine.

1.8B But His Poetry Persuades Her to Stay

She will stay! She has vowed it! May ill-wishers burst with envy!
I have won: she could not withstand my constant prayers.
Let jealous spite renounce its hollow joys!
My Cynthia has ceased to go on journeys
By novel ways.

I am dear, and for my sake Rome the dearest of cities;
She wants no kingdom, she says, if I'm not there;
However straitened the bed, she would rather sleep
In my arms and somehow or other be mine,
Than have well-dowered Hippodamia's ancient realm,
Or the wealth that Elis once won with its breed of horses.
Fine presents he gave, that fellow, and promised finer,
But she, no seeker of gain, declined
To quit my embrace.

I could never have moved her with gold or Indian pearls;
My poetry's devotion alone beguiled her.
Divine, then, the Muses; Apollo not slow with his aid
To the lover; and so, relying on these,
I offer my love.

Matchless Cynthia is mine! And now my feet
Tread the topmost stars; whether night shall come or day
She is mine; no rival steals a love so certain.
When my hair has turned to grey I still
Shall know this glory.

1.9 To a Scoffer fast in Love's Toils

I told you, my scornful friend, that love would visit you;
That you would not forever say what you liked. And see!
At the feet of a girl you lie in supplication.
Though you paid for her favours, she gives you orders
Just as she pleases.

Dodona's Doves could not prophesy better than I
Which girl, in affairs of love, will rule which boy.
This art is justly mine for my sorrow and tears;
But how I long to lay down my love
And become a novice!

For you, poor fellow, what use to recite grave poems,
Or tell the sad tale of the city of lyre-raised walls?
In love one verse of Mimnermus outweighs all Homer,
For peaceful Cupid wants tender songs.
Go, then, and put away your sombre books
And sing instead of themes that a girl
Would wish to hear.

What if her ready favours were denied you?
To call in midstream for water is playing the fool.
Not yet have you lost your colour or felt the touch
Of the real fire. This is only a glimmer
Of the troubles to come.

Then you would rather face Armenian tigers,
Or feel the gripe of the chains of Hades's wheel,
Than so often be struck to the marrow by Cupid's bow,
And find you cannot refuse your sweetheart
Whatever she asks.

Love, when he lends you wings to fly up high,
Is quick to drag you down with his other hand.
So do not let her ready compliance trick you;
A girl, once yours, clings all the tighter.
Then Love ensures that your eyes may never stray
Nor lets you lie awake but to think of her:
Love who keeps himself well hidden
Till you're struck to the bone.

Fly, whoever you are, from persistent blandishments!
What chance can there be, if flint and oaks must yield,
For one like you, just a tenuous breath of air?
If, then, you know what's proper, confess your error:
To declare who it is you love to distraction
Often eases the pain.

1.10 Advice to a Friend in Love

O gracious night, when I witnessed the birth of your love,
And was there along with you both to share your tears!
How keen a pleasure it gives me now to recall it—
That night I shall often invoke in my prayers,
When in your sweetheart's arms I saw you, Gallus,
Quite overcome, and with lengthy pauses
Dragging out your words.

Though sleep oppressed my sinking eyes, and the moon
Glowed red in the sky, her horses in mid career,
From your love's exchanges I could not bear to be parted,
So fierce a fire inhered in the words
That passed between you.

But since you were not afraid to confide in me,
I bring you now a reward for joys entrusted.
I can do much more than merely keep love's secrets;
In me, my friend, there is something better
Than faithful silence.

Yes, I can reunite discordant lovers;
I have power to open a loved one's slow-hinged door;
I can heal the recent pangs that others suffer;
No common remedy lies in my words.
I have learnt through Cynthia what I should always aim
To do or avoid: no slight thing, this,
That love has accomplished.

If a girl is out of humour, never argue.
And mind! No haughty tone, no long drawn silence.
If she asks for something, do not with sullen face
Deny her; and see that her words of kindness
Never go for nothing.

When scorned, she comes in wrath, and once hurt, forgets
To end the threats that at first were just;
But the humbler you are and the more submissive to love,
The oftener may you enjoy a propitious outcome.
Who means to abide and be happy in one girl's love
Can never be free, or disengage
His heart from her spell.

1.11 The Perils of a Resort of Fashion

As on holiday there, in Baiae's midst, my Cynthia,
Where Hercules' causeway lies along the shore,
You now admire the waters that wash the realm
Thesprotus ruled, now those by famed Misenum,
Do you pass your nights with any thought of me?
Have I still a place on the fringe of your love?
Or has some rival—I know not who—pretended
An ardent passion, and stolen you, Cynthia,
Away from my songs?

Amuse yourself rather, I beg, on the Lucrine Lake
In a miniature boat propelled by its tiny oars,
Or secluded beside the shallow waves of Teuthras,
Where the water so readily yields to a swimmer's hands.
But lend no leisured ear to seductive whispers
In luxurious ease on that shore of secrets.
For girls will lapse when there's no one there to watch them,
And, breaking their faith, will forget the Gods
By whom they swore.

I know your honour is fully tried and proven,
But at Baiae love's every move is cause for fear.
Forgive me, then, if my letters bring you words
You think ungracious, and lay the blame
On these fears of mine.

Would I guard the mother I love with greater care?
Would my life, without you, be worth a single thought?
Why, Cynthia, you alone are my home and parents
And all the hours of joy I can know.
And so, when I meet my friends, if they tell me I'm sad
Or gay or however else, I'll answer
'It's all my Cynthia!'

But—quick as you can—depart from vice-haunted Baiae—
That shore that to many will bring their separation,
The enemy always of every pure-hearted girl.
A curse on those waters of Baiae through which
Love stands indicted!

1.12 Loved no Longer

Must you persist in this trumped-up charge of indolence—
That I dally in Rome, the accomplice of my love?
Cynthia now is sundered from my bed
By as many miles as divide the Don from the Tiber.
Her embraces no longer sustain our accustomed love;
Her voice no longer sounds in my ear
With its wonted sweetness.

I was once in favour: in those days there was none
Whose luck it was to enjoy a love so faithful.
All envied us. Can a God have overwhelmed me?
Or some witch's herb from Caucasian heights
Have taken her from me?

I am not what I was; long journeys alter a girl;
So short a spell, yet how deep a love has vanished!
For the first time now I must know long, lonely nights,
And be compelled to burden my ears
With my own complaining.

Happy the man who can pour out his woes to his loved one;
Love exults when his altar is splashed with tears:
Or if a lover who's scorned transfers his passion,
A fresh devotion will bring its joys.
But the Gods forbid me ever to love another
Or to stop loving Cynthia: she, the first,
Shall be the last.

1.13 To a Philanderer caught at last

You, as your way is, Gallus, will be delighted
At my plight—that, bereft of love, I am left forlorn.
But, my faithless friend, I will not copy your taunts.
May no girl, Gallus, ever harbour
A wish to deceive you!

And while your renown as beguiler of girls increases,
And, sure of yourself, you looked for no stable love,
Entranced by some girl, you grow wan with your tardy cares :
At the very first step you have slipped, and away
Down the slope you go.

Thus you are punished for mocking those others' woes ;
One girl will exact for many a grievous requital.
She'll curb your promiscuous amours, nor will you seek
New pleasures and always find a welcome
At every door.

No spiteful gossip, no soothsayer told me this ;
I saw it : how, then, deny it when I was witness ?
You were overwhelmed, your neck tight bound by her arms ;
And long you held her, Gallus, weeping,
As though on those precious lips you would leave your life,
And then—but shame, my friend, shall hide
Your further longings !

To disjoin this embrace of yours was beyond my power,
So wild was the passion that raged between you.
Why, Poseidon, disguised as the River God she loved,
Held in a clasp less fierce the yielding Tyro ;
And Hercules, burning on Oeta for Hebe, his Goddess,
Felt less keenly the first delights
Of his new-found godhead.

In one single day you've surpassed all other lovers !
Truly that girl has lit for you no faint torch,
Nor allowed a return to your old disdainful ways :
She will let none steal you ; and on and on
Your passion will drive you.

No wonder : she's lovely as Leda ; fit for Jove ;
Worth more alone than all three of Leda's children.
She has more allure than any Grecian heroine ;
Jupiter, caught by the charm of her words,
Would be bound to love her.

Since, then, you're once and for all to die of love,
Enjoy it : no other door deserved your siege.
May your novel aberration bring you happiness !
And may this girl alone be all
You shall ever desire !

1.14 Wealth must Yield to Love

By Tiber's wave you recline at ease, and drink
Your Lesbian wine from a cup great Mentor fashioned,
Admiring now the skiffs that race swiftly by,
Now the sluggish rope-towed barges;
And all your groves of trees stretch up their tops,
Majestic as any whose weight the Caucasus feel:
Yet nothing of this can stand against my love,
For Love has never learnt to yield
To the power of riches.

If my dearest protracts the hush of the longed-for night
In my arms, or with ready love draws out the day,
Then golden Pactolus flows beneath my roof
And the ocean's depths yield up their pearls.
My joys give promise that kings would grant me priority,
And may they last till the Fates decree my end;
For if Love's against him, who delights in wealth?
May no rich profits accrue to me
With Venus frowning!

Venus has power to subdue the might of heroes
And to fill with dismay the hardest of hearts.
She is dauntless, Tullus; she crosses the onyx threshold;
Straight up to the purple bed she steps, and there
From side to side she tosses the wretched youth
Whose many coloured silken fabrics
Bring him no relief.

While Venus favours I'll not fear to scorn
The wealth of kingdoms or even such gifts
As those of Alcinoüs.

I.15 Cynthia's Fickleness

Often I've dreaded the blows of your fickle heart,
But, Cynthia, never this present perfidy.
See to what perils fortune drags me off,
And yet, in my hour of fear, how slow your coming!
You rearrange your coiffure of yesterday,
You search out in lengthy session the right complexion,
And with oriental jewels bedeck your breast—
Just like a beauty preparing to meet
A new admirer.

Calypso was not so unfeeling that time Ulysses
Set sail and left her to weep by the desolate waves:
Long she sat in sorrow with hair unkempt
And long complained to the unjust sea;
And though she never thought to see him again,
She kept him in memory still and grieved
For the joys long shared.

Hypsipyle, sick at heart in her empty room,
Stood and watched as the winds bore Jason away;
And having once loved and pined for her guest from Thessaly,
Was never touched by another love.
And when Alpheisiboea avenged on her own two brothers
Her husband's death, love burst the bonds of blood;
While Evadne, who found on her husband's mournful pyre
Her own last rites, became a fable
Of Argive fidelity.

And yet no thought of these women could change your ways,
And make you, like them, a theme for a famous story.
No more false vows, then, Cynthia, to recall
Those broken already; don't rouse the forgetful Gods.
To my cost, my overbold one, as much as yours,
Will you have to bewail any retribution
That overtakes you.

Back from the ocean's vastness rivers will flow,
In inverse order the year spin out its seasons,
Before the love in my inmost heart shall change.
Be, then, whatever you like, but never
Belong to another.

And do not hold those eyes of yours so cheap,
Through which I have so often believed your falsehoods.
By them you would take your oath that, if you lied,
Might they tumble out on your outstretched hands!
And can you raise them up to the mighty sun
Without a tremor, knowing you're guilty
Of conduct so wanton?

Did you have to change colour so often, or squeeze the tears
From eyes that had no wish to weep?—
Those eyes for which I perish, a warning to others
Like me that it's never safe to trust
To your loved one's blandishments.

I.16 The Tribulations of a Door

'Once a portal famed for ancestral virtue,
Wide open I stood as mighty triumphs went by;
My threshold, thronged by gilded battle-cars,
Was wet with the suppliant tears of captives.
Now drunkards buffet me in nocturnal brawls,
And often I groan as I'm struck by unworthy hands;
There's never a lack of pendent wreaths to shame me,
And discarded torches tell the excluded
Another's within.

'I cannot avert the disgrace of my mistress's nights;
Once honoured, I'm now given up to erotic scribblings.
Yet who can reclaim her—who can induce her to spare
The good name she blights by a life more wanton
Than this age of licence?

'Amidst these troubles all I can do is weep,
While the suppliant's lengthy vigil augments my woe:
He never allows my pillars any respite,
But on and on, in his wheedling voice,
He chants his plaint:

“O door, more deeply cruel than your mistress even,
Why do you stand fast shut in forbidding silence?
Why never withdraw your bolts to admit my love,
Or in pity pass on my furtive prayers?
Is my pain to have no end? Is shameful sleep
To overtake me here on the threshold
My body has warmed?

“Midnight, the splendid stars, and the breeze the frost
Of dawn has chilled, all pity me lying here.
Alone you're without compassion for human sorrows.
Your hinges stand forever mute,
And you make me no answer.

“Could a feeble note of my voice but find a way
Through some hollow chink and strike on your mistress's ear!
Then, though the rocks of Etna may have more feeling,
Though harder she may be than iron or steel,
Yet she'll never master her eyes or suppress the sighs
That will surely rise amidst her reluctant tears.
But now she lies there, propped in the lucky arms
Of another, and all my words are lost
On the light night air.

“But you, the sole, the special cause of my grief,
Are never assuaged by the gifts I bring.
My tongue, when provoked, may well give way to insult,
But with no such uncivil words has it injured you
That beside the crossroads you leave me, hoarse with lamenting,
Here to keep my anguished vigil
The long night through.

“Yet many are the songs I've spun you of novel verse,
And many the kisses I've knelt on your steps to give you!
And often before your pillars, perfidious door,
Have I not, with all due rites, bestowed
What my vows have promised?”

‘With these complaints and all else that you wretched lovers
Find to say he outsings the birds' dawn chorus.
So now, through my mistress's sins and the endless wailing
Of this suitor, my name will be reviled
And scorned for ever.’

1.17 Never Leave your Sweetheart!

It is right, since I had the heart to run away
From my loved one, that here I talk to desolate sea-birds,
While Cassiope's harbour will never see my ship,
And my prayers, on an unresponsive shore,
Go all to waste.

In your absence, Cynthia, even the winds fight for you :
Just listen to the savage threats of the howling blast!
Will no change of fortune come to quell the storm?
Or are my bones to lie hidden here
In these meagre sands?

Exchange your fierce reproaches for something kinder ;
Let the night and the vicious shoals be sufficient sentence.
Surely you could not lay my spirit to rest
Dry-eyed, though never, in the fold of your dress,
To gather my bones !

A curse on the man who first made ships and sails,
And forced a way across the unwilling deep !
To have overcome my loved one's wayward ways—
And, however unkind, she's beyond compare—
Was less hard than to gaze on shores that unknown forests
Encircle, longing to see the fires
Of Castor and Pollux.

If fate had brought my griefs to a Roman grave,
If passion were ended and there stood that final stone,
My love would have graced my pyre with her own dear tresses,
And softly on delicate roses laid my bones ;
Then would she, over the dust I had now become,
Have invoked my name that the earth might be
No heavy burden.

But come, you sea-nymphs, daughters of beautiful Doris ;
In propitious chorus unfurl for me gleaming sails.
If Love ever glided down to alight on your waves,
Spare one who likewise suffers, and grant him
A kindly shore.

I.18 Cynthia's Unkindness

Fit spot for a lover's plaint, so lonely and silent,
An empty grove the breath of the West Wind haunts:
Here, if these desolate rocks can keep my secrets,
I am free, without fear of rebuke, to voice
My hidden griefs.

Where to begin this tale of your arrogance, Cynthia?
What was the earliest cause you gave me to weep?
Lately counted one of the lucky lovers,
Now I am made to wear the brand
Of your love's displeasure.

What have I done to deserve it? What spells have changed you?
A supposed new rival—can this be why you frown?
May you never, fickle one, come again to my arms
If another woman's shapely foot
Ever crossed my threshold!

And though my sorrows owe you a bitter requital,
Never would my resentment grow so fierce
As to give just cause for your endless rage against me,
And for shedding so many tears that your eyes
Are swollen with weeping.

Is it all because you do not see on my face
The pallor that signals love and proclaims fidelity?
If trees feel love, may the oak, and the pine so dear
To Arcady's God, bear witness for me
How often my words resound in their delicate shade,
And how often, Cynthia, on their bark
I have carved your name!

Is it then because your wrongs have brought me such trouble?
But this is only known to your silent door.
My way is to suffer in fear whatever your pride
Dictates, nor complain of the sharp distress
Your actions cause me.

My reward for this?—Chill springs and chillier rocks,
And troubled rest by an overgrown track;
And whatever my plaintive song can find to tell
Must perforce be told in solitude here
To the chattering birds.

Be whatever you will, the woods shall re-echo 'Cynthia',
And the desolate crags shall know no rest
From the sound of your name.

I.19 To Cynthia, not to Forget Him in the Grave

The gloomy world where the dead abide, my Cynthia,
Now holds no fears, nor the doom the pyre fulfils.
But in the grave to be without your love!
This dread oppresses me more than the rites of death.
Not so lightly has Cupid clung to my eyes
That my dust may ever lie inert,
All love forgotten.

In the realm of darkness, Protesilaüs, the hero
Of Thessaly, could not forget the wife he loved.
Still eager with spectral hands to clasp his joy,
He returned, though only a shadow now,
To his ancient home.

There, ghost or whatever else, I shall still be yours:
Great love leaps over the very shores of death.
And let that band of lovely heroines come—
The spoil of Troy that fell to Greece—
Not one could ever match my Cynthia's beauty.
Though age by fate's decree should long detain you
(And if only Earth allows it I'll hold her just),
Your spirit, coming however late,
Will be dear to my tears.

If, while you live, I am ashes, may you feel
The same for me: then death were nowhere bitter.
But, Cynthia, how I dread that a hostile love,
Spurning my grave, will part you from my dust,
And force you against your will to dry your tears;
For even the loyalest of girls will bend
Under constant pressure.

So, while we may, let us love and rejoice together:
Love, though it had the whole of time,
Would be all too short.

1.20 Beware of the Nymphs!

In return for unfailing friendship here's a warning
(Don't let it, Gallus, escape your unheeding mind):
Misfortune often attends the unwary lover.
This could the River Ascanius tell you,
The Argonauts' scourge.

The boy you dote on, in looks as well as renown,
Is fully the equal of Hylas, son of Theiodamas.
So if you skirt the sacred forest streams
Of Umbria or bathe your feet in Anio's waves,
Or stroll on the Giants' strand or wherever else
A wandering river offers a welcome,
Guard him well from the Nymphs so eager to seize
(Just as desirous as any are Italy's Naiads),
Lest rugged mountains, Gallus, and icy streams
And lakes till then unseen become
Your constant haunts.

Such sufferings Hercules bore in a far-off land,
Wandering and weeping to find Ascanius pitiless.
For they tell how the Argo once, from Pegasa's dock,
Set out on a voyage for distant Phasis;
She glided along and soon the waves of the Hellespont
Lay in her wake, and she found a mooring
At the Mysian Rocks.

Here on the restful land the band of heroes
Set foot, and gathered soft fronds to cover the beach.
But invincible Hercules' comrade made his way
Inshore to search for the scarce fresh water
From a distant spring.

Then Zetes and Calais followed, sons of the North Wind,
Above him both suspended on hovering hands.
Thus from his upturned mouth they sought to pluck
Kisses and bear them off by in turn retreating;
But, hanging protected beneath the edge of a wing,
He repelled with a branch their aerial stratagems.
So Orithyia's sons retired, and Hylas
Went (what sorrow!)—went on his way
To the Nymphs of the Spring.

Yes, under Arganthus' peak lay the spring of Pege,
The marshy home beloved of Bithynia's Nymphs.
There wild trees grew, and from them dewy apples
Depended, owing no debt to anyone's care,
While in the water meadows all around
Lilies mingled their gleaming white
With the scarlet of poppies.

And now with tender nail he nipped off the flowers,
Preferring them, like a boy, to his purposed task;
Now, all unknowing, hung over the delicate ripples,
Detained by the mirrored pictures' lure.
At length he was ready to help himself from the stream
And, propped on one shoulder, plunged in his hand
To draw a great urnful.

Fired by the boy's white beauty, the Dryads ceased
Their accustomed dance. Then forward he slipped and fell,
And softly they drew him through the yielding water.
To his cry, as they seized him, Hercules' far-off voice
Replied again and again; but the breeze returned
From the spring's remotest margin only
An echoed name.

Warned by this story, Gallus, guard your love;
I have seen you trust your beautiful Hylas
Too near the Nymphs.

1.21 A Soldier's Last Request

You who make haste to evade a comrade's fate,
From Perusia's circumvallations a wounded soldier,
Why, at my groans, do you turn on me eyes that seem
To start from your head? Of your fellow soldiers
I was the closest.

Save yourself, then, to fill your parents with joy,
And so that your sister may learn from your tears
How Gallus came safe through the midst of Caesar's swords,
But could not escape the stroke of an unknown hand;
And tell her, too, of whatever bones she may find
On these Tuscan mountains lying scattered,
That these are mine.

1.22 The Poet's Birthplace

In the name of our constant friendship you ask me, Tullus,
My rank and descent, and what Household Gods
Ruled over my home.

You know the Perusian graves where our countrymen lie,
Italy's scene of death in the bitter days
When civil discord goaded the people of Rome
(And for me, O Tuscan soil, this special grief,
That you suffered my kinsman's limbs to lie disdained
Nor cover his wretched bones with one grain of earth):
There, where fertile Umbria's prosperous fields
Are nearest the plain spread out below,
Lies the land that bore me.

Book II

II. I No Theme but Love

Whence, you ask me, come all my poems of love,
And my book that sounds on men's lips its note of languor.
Calliope does not sing me these songs nor Apollo;
A girl provides me with all I have
Of poetic talent.

If I have seen her abroad, a shimmer of silk,
Her silken dress is sure to become a volume;
If on her forehead a few loose tresses stray,
Her tresses I praise so she walks in proud delight.
Or perhaps her ivory fingers strike up an air
On the lyre and I marvel to see the smooth skill of her hands;
Or she droops her eyes that clamour for sleep, and at once
I have scores of novel themes for my songs.
But if she flings off her clothes and all naked involves me
In loving strife, why then I compose long Iliads.
From whatever my loved one does or whatever she says
Or even from nothing at all there springs
A momentous story.

But if, Maecenas, the Fates had given me power
To incite heroic hosts to arms,
I would not sing of the Titans and how they piled
Mountain on mountain to make a road to heaven,
Or of ancient Thebes, or Troy that brought Homer his fame,
Or Xerxes ordering seas to coalesce,
Nor yet of the Kings of old Rome, or the vehement pride
Of high-towered Carthage, or Marius crushing
The threats of the Cimbrians.

No: I would tell of Caesar's wars and feats—
Great Caesar you love and serve; then I'd turn to you.
For whenever I sang of Mutina or of Philippi's
Citizen graves, or of battles off Sicily's shore,
Or the overturned hearths of Tuscany's ancient people,
Or beaches captured on Pharos, Ptolemy's isle;
Or if of Egypt I sang and the humbled Nile
Displayed in a triumph, his seven mouths all captive,
When the necks of Kings were encircled with golden fetters,
And Actian prows sped along the Sacred Way—

With these deeds my Muse would always weave your name,
True heart alike in peace and war.
It was thus that Achilles' feats on earth and those
Of Theseus in Hades kept alive
Their comrades' memories.

But just as Callimachus' voice was too weak to thunder
Of the battle on Phlegra's plain between Gods and Giants,
So my spirit does not suffice to trace Caesar's lineage
Back to his Trojan sires in heroic verse.
The sailor tells of winds; the ploughman of oxen;
The soldier counts his wounds, the shepherd his sheep.
My theme is battles played out in a narrow bed.
And so let each man pass his days
At the task he knows.

A glory to love till death; a glory too
To delight in one love; may mine be my joy alone.
I seem to have heard my loved one chide fickle girls,
And, because of Helen, denounce the whole of the Iliad.
Were I doomed to drink such a potion as Phaedra brewed
For her stepson who had the good luck to escape all harm,
Or to die at Circe's hands of a magic draught,
Or be boiled in the Colchian witch's cauldron,
Since this one girl has stolen my senses away,
I would have my funeral train set out
From no house but hers.

For every human affliction there's a remedy;
Love alone rejects the physician's skill.
Machaon healed the lameness of Philoctetes;
To Phoenix Chiron restored the sight of his eyes;
While the herbs of the God Asclepius brought Androgeon
Back to life and his father's hearth
Then, too, to the Mysian King the spear of Achilles—
The very weapon that once had given
The wound—gave health.

If someone can cure my sickness, then he alone
Can hand Tantalus apples and fill the maidens' cask
From their pitchers and so relieve their tender necks
From the everlasting watery burden;
He too is the one to free from the crags of Caucasus
The arms of Prometheus and drive away
That bird from his breast.

And so, Maecenas, hope of the youth of Rome
And their envy, and my true glory in life and death,
Whenever the Fates reclaim this life of mine
And I'm just a name on a little marble tablet,
If your route should chance to bring your British chariot,
With its fine-carved yoke, beside my grave,
Then stay and, weeping, say to my silent dust:
'Death to this unhappy one came
Through a girl's hard heart.'

II.2 Cynthia's Beauty

I was free; I meant to live and sleep alone;
And yet, though peace was signed, Love overreached me,
Why lingers on earth a mortal form like hers?
Free pardon, Jupiter, I grant you
For your thefts of old!

Auburn hair; long hands; a majestic stature;
A bearing worthy of Juno, sister of Jove,
Or of Pallas Athenë marching to Ithacan altars,
Shielding her breast with the Gorgon's head
That has snakes for hair.

She is like Isomache, heroine child of the Lapiths,
A fitting spoil for the Centaurs amidst the wine;
Or like Brimo who, by the holy waves of Boebeis,
Laid, so they tell, her maidenhead
At Mercury's side.

Yield, then, you Goddesses, who on Ida's height
Were once judged by a shepherd, your clothes all laid aside.
And may old age refuse to harm the beauty
Of my love, though she live as many ages
As the Sibyl of Cumae!

II.3A Cynthia the Irresistible

'So after denying that any girl could harm you,
You are now held fast, your arrogant airs all vanished!
Poor wretch, you can hardly stay quiet a single month:
Already you're writing a second volume
To tell of your shame.'

I might as well have expected a fish to live
On dry land, a wild boar in the strangeness of the sea
As have tried to devote my nights to serious study.
You may put love off for a time but never
Can it be extinguished.

It was not so much her looks, however radiant,
That took me (and lilies are not so white as my loved one;
Mountain snows seem vying with Spanish vermilion,
Or rose petals swimming in purest milk).
It was not the way her hair flows over the smoothness
Of her neck, nor her eyes, twin torches, stars to me,
Nor yet was it just a girl in shimmering silk.
(For no light reason am I the honey-tongued lover!)
It is rather the grace of her dancing when wine is served,
Like Ariadne's leading the Bacchic chorus,
And, when she ventures to sing to the Grecian harp,
The skill of her playing, a match for the Muses' lyre;
And then her verses that challenge those Corinna
Wrote of old and reckoned no others
Could ever equal.

At your birth, my love, when first you saw the day,
Bright Cupid's sneeze sounded a happy omen.
The Gods it was who gave you those heavenly gifts;
Never suppose you had them from your mother.
No: from no human birth sprang such endowments.
No nine months' interval could ever
Have formed your graces.

Alone you were born for the glory of Roman girls;
You will be the first of them all to lie with Jove;
Not always will you resort to my mortal bed.
Beauty that left with Helen is back on earth.

Shall I wonder now if young men are aflame for Cynthia?
If Troy had perished on her account
It had won more honour.

I marvelled once that a girl should be the cause
Of the mighty war at Troy between Europe and Asia.
But Paris and Menelaüs both were wise—
The one to press for his wife, the other to hold her.
For a lovely face it befitted Achilles himself
To die, and even Priam deemed it
Just cause for war.

If there's one who seeks more fame than ancient pictures
Have ever won, let my loved one be his model.
If then he shows her either to West or to East,
Certain it is he will set the East
And the West on fire.

II.3B Two Fragments

- (a) At least let me stay confined within these bounds;
If I fell to another, fiercer love—what misery!
But just as the ox at first will jib at the plough,
Yet later, used to the yoke, goes quiet to the fields,
So at first a vehement youth will chafe at love;
Then, broken in, he is ready to bear
Both good and ill.
- (b) The seer Melampus, convicted of stealing the cattle
Of Iphiclus, wore the fetters of shame;
Yet he did it not for gain but because of the urging
Of lovely Pero, soon a bride
In the hall of his father.

II.4 Girls are so Difficult

You must deprecate first your loved one's many slights,
Often ask for her favour and go away rebuffed;
You must often bite your undeserving nails,
And in your impatience tap the ground
With irresolute foot.

It has done me no good to sprinkle my hair with scent,
Nor yet to affect a lingering, measured gait;
No magical herb avails, no midnight sorceress,
No potion brewed by a witch's hand.
To what false-tongued seer am I not a source of profit?
What ancient crone has not probed my dreams
Again and again?

Although we can see no cause, no overt blow,
Yet by an invisible route come many ills.
It is no soft bed or physician the sufferer needs;
No unwholesome season nor pestilent air assails him.
One minute he's walking abroad; in the next struck down!
Whatever love is, it's useless to try
To guard against it.

If a man is my enemy, let him love a girl;
Let him dote on a boy, whoever's my friend.
Down a tranquil stream you then will sail in safety,
For how can the waves off so tiny a shore afflict you?
A boy will often relent at a single word;
A girl is hardly to be placated
By your very blood.

II.5 To Cynthia: a Warning

Is it true that all over Rome your name, my Cynthia,
Is bandied about, your shameless ways no secret?
Was this, my false one, all I'd the right to expect?
You shall pay the forfeit: a wind will take me
To another harbour.

Though many deceive, I shall find a girl who's glad
To win fame through my poems, and she will not affront me
By her heartless conduct but keep her sting for you.
And then, alas, so long my loved one,
Too late will you weep!

Now, while anger is fresh, is the time to go:
If resentment cools, then love will return for certain.
Carpathian waves are slower to change at the blast
From the North, or storm clouds to twist in the Southerly gale,
Than angry lovers to turn right round at a word.
Withdraw, Propertius, your neck from the unjust yoke
While you may. It will grieve you, yes, but only at first.
When once you bring yourself to bear them,
Love's pains grow lighter.

But, my love, in the name of Juno's gracious laws,
Do not let your perversity harm you so!
Not only the bull with its curving horns will strike
Its foe: the sheep when hurt resists its assailant.
Yet I am not one who in anger would tear the clothes
From your perjured body or break down your bolted door;
I would never pull the braids of your hair, or cause you
With savage hands any other harm.
Such brawling as this I leave to rustic boors—
Those whose heads no wreath of ivy
Has ever encircled.

So something I'll write that your whole life cannot cancel:
'Cynthia, powerful in beauty, light of word.'
Believe me, Cynthia, however you scorn the murmurs
Of scandal, this verse will bring a pallor
To those cheeks of yours.

II.6 Excuses for Jealousy

The house of Laïs at Corinth, though at her door
All Greece paid court, was never thronged like yours;
Thaïs, famed by Menander and once the darling
Of Athens, attracted no such swarm;
Nor yet did Phrynë, enriched by all those lovers
So that she could have re-erected
Demolished Thebes.

Then often, too, you fabricate false kinsmen;
Always they're with you claiming kisses by right.
And I—I'm jealous even of young men's portraits,
Of their very names, of a speechless babe in his cot;
Of your mother, too, if she lavishes kisses upon you,
Of your sister or girl friend sharing your bed.
I'm jealous of everything—full of fears (forgive me!);
Suspicious, poor wretch, that under each dress
There lurks a man.

Through their lusts, as story has it, men went to battle;
In such beginnings you see the Trojan graves.
And this same madness drove the Centaurs to hurl
In Pirithoüs' face their deep-chased goblets.
But why cite Greeks? You, Romulus, whom the she-wolf
Nourished on ferine milk, gave sanction to sin;
You showed us how to seize Sabine maids unpunished;
And now, at Rome, there's nothing Love will not dare.
To build temples to Chastity's Goddess does no good
To virgins, when wives may be whatever they please.
Happy Admetus's wife and she who slept
In Ulysses' bed and all who love
The homes of their husbands.

The hand that was first to paint erotic pictures
And introduce lewd images into chaste homes
Corrupted girls' innocent eyes and would not let them
Remain unversed in its own depravity.
May he groan in darkness who by such art revealed
Immodest things Love keeps for secret joys.
Such images never used to emblazon our homes
Nor our walls to be painted with scenes of shame.

Yet it is not undeserved : the cobweb veils
The shrine ; rank weeds have overgrown
The deserted Gods.

What guardians, then, should I set for you, what threshold
No rival foot may overstep?
For the strictest protection fails if a girl rejects it ;
But, Cynthia, she who's ashamed to sin
Is safe enough.

II.7 A Dire Threat to Love Removed

You rejoiced for certain, Cynthia, when the law
Was repealed at whose passing for long we had wept together
In case it should part us ; though not Jove himself
Can divide two lovers against their will.
'But Caesar is powerful !' Yes, but his power is of arms.
In love the conquest of nations signifies nothing.
Sooner I'd let my head be struck from my neck
Than quench for the sake of a bride the torch of our passion ;
Or, another's husband, pass by your fast-shut door,
Glancing backwards with tear-drenched eyes
At the home I'd deserted.

What lullaby would my wedding flute then sing you—
Flute that would sound more doleful than funeral trumpet !
How should I supply sons for my country's victories?
No soldier will ever be born of my blood.
But were I to follow my true camp—that of my loved one—
Castor's charger would not step grandly enough.
For from my loved one's service come fame and renown—
Fame that's spread as far as the wintry
Banks of the Dnieper.

You are my only love ; may I be yours !
This means more to me, Cynthia, than the title
Of father. Yes, no wife, no mistress will ever
Entice me away ; you will always for me
Be both wife and mistress.

π.8A Love's Unhappy Cycle

She is stolen from me—the girl I have loved so long;
And do you, my friend, now tell me to shed no tears?
No discords are bitter but those incurred for love.
Try strangling me: I shall be a milder enemy.
Can I bear to see her lie in another's arms?
And shall she, just now called mine, be known
As mine no longer?

Everything changes, and love must change for certain.
You vanquish or else you are vanquished: this is love's cycle.
Mighty captains have fallen, mighty tyrants;
Thebes once stood four-square and Troy
Was lofty-towered.

π.8B She shall Die too!

What presents I gave, what poems I wrote, yet she,
Who is surely made of steel, never said 'I love you'!
And do you, outrageous girl, think me overbold,
After all these years of enduring you and your household?
Have I ever seemed to you anything else than a slave?
And will you ceaselessly hurl at my head
Your words of scorn?

Are you then, Propertius, to die in early youth?
Well die! And may she have much joy in your death!
Let her harass your ghost, if she will, and afflict your spirit;
Let her trample upon your funeral pyre
And spurn your bones!

But you shall not escape: you shall die along with me!
The blood of us both shall drip from the self-same blade!
I know this death will bring me only dishonour—
Yes, a dishonourable death indeed;
But still you shall die!

π.8c An interpolated fragment

What! Did not Haemon stab himself with his sword
And fall and die by Antigone's tomb,
And mingle his bones with the bones of the luckless girl
Without whom he could not bear to return
To his Theban home?

π.8D Love Snatched away and Restored

Why Achilles even, forlorn, bereft of his mistress,
Allowed his arms to lie in his tent unused.
He saw the Greeks all scattered in flight by the shore,
And their camp aglow with Hector's brands;
He saw his friend Patroclus stretched on the sand,
Ghastly in death, his loose hair daubed with blood.
And he let it all happen because of lovely Briseïs;
So fierce was his pain when love was snatched away.
But at last, when the wrong was redressed and the captive girl
Was restored to him, then he dragged brave Hector
At his horses' tails.

No wonder that over me, inferior far,
With no Goddess for mother, no prowess in arms,
Love rightfully triumphs.

II.9A Deserted for Another

What he is now—that fellow—I often was;
But perhaps in an hour he'll be cast aside
And another favoured.

Penelope, who was worthy of many suitors,
For twice ten years was able to live untouched;
To defer remarriage by feigning a womanly industry,
Then unwinding by nightly stealth the web of the day.
And though, grown old with waiting, she had no hope
Of ever seeing Ulysses again,
She yet stayed true.

Briseïs, too, embraced the lifeless Achilles,
And beat her fair face with distracted hands;
Yes, she, a captive, mourned her master, and washed
His blood-stained corpse among Simoïs' golden shallows.
And, besmirching her hair, she gathered up from his pyre
In her little hands the great hero's tremendous bones.
For his father, Peleus, was not there, nor his mother,
The green sea's Goddess, nor Deïdamia,
Once wife, now widow.

So Greece in those days rejoiced in her true-born daughters,
And honour prevailed amid the clash of arms.
But you could not, just for a night, be without a lover,
Or alone, my false one, just for a day.
So the two of you drained your wine-cups and laughed and joked,
And little good, I dare say, you said of me.
Why that fellow you chase is the very one who left you!
May the Gods, as they see your infatuation,
Give you joy of the man!

Was it only for this that, when the waters of Styx
Seemed about to engulf you, I made those vows for your safety,
And we, your friends, stood round your bed and wept?
By the Gods you mock, where then was that man
Or of what account?

Were I a soldier detained in distant India,
What then? or were my ship becalmed at sea?

But it's easy for you to concoct false tales and devices;
This is one lesson women can always learn.
Less quick are the sand-banks to change in the shifting blast,
Less ready, in the winter wind, are the leaves to tremble,
Than a woman's anger, whether its cause be grave
Or trivial only, is swift to annul
Her solemn compact.

And now, since you've chosen your course, I'll be on my way
And, you Loves, I charge you, make ready sharper arrows:
See who can first transfix me: unloose the bonds
Of my life! You will surely win great glory
By spilling my blood!

The stars are my witnesses, yes, and the morning frost,
And the door so stealthily opened for me, poor fool,
That nothing in life was ever so precious as you,
And nothing will be despite your hostility.
In my bed no woman shall ever leave her imprint.
And since you will not let me be yours,
I will live alone.

And if only I've spent my years as the Gods demand,
In the act of love let that fellow be turned
To a lump of stone!

II.9.B A fragment: Death to his Rival!

That fight for a throne in which Theban chieftains fell,
Though their mother stood between them, was not more fierce.
And if I might fight, and were Cynthia there between us,
I would not fear to go to my death,
Could I compass yours.

II.10 Aspirations towards the Heroic

It is time to tread a new measure on Helicon's slopes;
To give the charger his head on the open plain.
Now I would tell of squadrons strong for battle;
Of my leader's camp where the spirit of Rome abides.
But if my strength should fail, why then my temerity
Is sure of praise, for in matters of moment
The intention suffices.

Youth should sing of love; manhood of arms.
I will sing of war, for the theme of my sweetheart is written.
Let me walk with a graver step and with knitted brow;
My Muse is about to teach me a different tune.
Arise then, my spirit, and leave your humble station;
And, my songs, find strength! The occasion calls
For a powerful voice.

The Euphrates now refuses to guard the rear
Of the Parthian horseman and grieves to have stayed the Crassi,
While India, Augustus, bows her neck in your triumph,
The virgin realm of Arabia trembles before you,
And if there's a land removed to the ends of the earth,
It shall shortly be your captive and feel
The weight of your hand.

I will follow your camp; my songs of your wars shall make me
A famous poet; may fate keep this in store!
But just as we lay our garland before the feet
Of a lofty statue whose head we cannot reach,
So now, too weak to ascend a song of glory,
I offer poor incense only with humble rites.
Not yet does my poetry know the heroic springs
On Helicon's heights; the stream in the valley
Is where Love bathed it.

II.11 No Exemption from Oblivion

Be a theme, if you like, for poems, or stay unknown:
Who praises sows his seed in sterile ground.
Believe me, the gloomy day of the final rites
Will bear all your gifts away on one bier with you;
And passers-by will spare no thought for your grave,
Nor say: 'These ashes were once a girl
Of accomplished graces.'

II.12 Love's Portrait

Whoever he was who here depicted Cupid
As a boy, did he not possess the master touch?
He saw that lovers live without discernment;
That, attending to trivial cares, they throw
Great blessings away.

And not for nothing he added those fanning wings
And showed him flying out of a human heart;
For hither and thither we're tossed about by the waves,
And the wind's never steady in any one quarter.
Rightly, too, his hand is armed with barbed arrows,
And from either shoulder his Cretan quiver hangs;
For indeed he strikes before we, in our security,
See there's an enemy, nor from his wounds
Is there any recovery.

In me his arrows stay fixed, and his boyish image
Stays too, but surely he must have lost his wings.
For, alas! he does not fly away from my breast
But conducts in my veins unceasing warfare.
How can my dried-up heart be a pleasing home?
If you have any shame, then take your weapons
And go elsewhere!

You should try your venom on those as yet untouched;
Not I but my tenuous shadow feels your blows.
And if you destroy it, who will sing songs like these
(For my trifling Muse is all for your honour)?
Who will then sing of my loved one's shapely head,
Her slim fingers and dusky eyes, and her feet—
How they fall so softly?

II.13A His Muse is all for Cynthia

The richest King of Persia was never armed
With as many arrows as these that Cupid
Has fixed in my heart.

Let me not, he bade me, despise my lightweight poems;
My home was in Ascra's grove where the Muses dwell,
Not in order that sacred oaks should follow my singing,
Or that through the valley of Thrace I should lead wild beasts;
No, rather to charm my Cynthia with my verses,
Thus winning more fame by my art than Linus
In Grecian story.

I am not so much an admirer of lovely looks,
Nor yet of the woman who vaunts her illustrious lineage;
May it be my joy, in the arms of a cultured girl,
To have read to her poems that pleased her impeccable ear.
When this has happened, then all that they babble about me
I shall soon dismiss; with my loved one for judge
I shall rest secure.

Would she only incline her ear to a kindly peace!
Why then I could well endure the hostility
Of Jove himself.

II.13B He thinks of his Obsequies

Hear then, whenever death shall close my eyes,
How I want you to keep my funeral:
Let there be no long procession wearing the masks
Of forebears, or trumpet vainly bewailing my fate;
Provide no couch for me, ivory-framed and spread
With cloth of gold to support me in death;
And let no line of mourners bear dishes of incense;
I want just the simple rites of humble folk.
An ample train if I take three books of verses—
My precious gifts to Proserpine,
The Queen of the Dead.

And you yourself will follow, beating the breast
You have bared in grief, nor weary of calling my name.
You will bring the onyx box of Syrian spices,
And on my ice-cold lips you'll press
Your final kisses.

Then, when the fire beneath has turned me to ashes,
Let a little earthen jar receive my spirit,
And a laurel planted over my narrow grave
Give shade to the spot where my pyre burnt out.
And write that he who now is horrid dust
Once was the devotee of an only love.
This tomb of mine shall be no less widely known
To fame than was Achilles' grave
With its stain of blood.

And when fate shall call you too, then take the road
That brings your grey hairs here to this mindful stone;
And meanwhile do not despise me in the grave,
For some awareness of truth still clings
To our sentient dust.

If only one of the Three, the sisters who hold
Men's fates, had in the cradle bidden me die!
What use to sustain this breath whose date none knows?
Nestor was ashes only after three lifetimes;
But if some Trojan soldier on Ilion's ramparts
Had abridged his doom of protracted years,
He would never have seen Antilochus, his son,
Interred, or cried, 'Why, death, for me
Do you come so late?'

Yet sometimes will you weep for the lover you've lost:
A steadfast love is the due of those who have gone.
Let Venus, my witness, tell how snowy Adonis,
As he hunted the savage boar on Idalium's heights,
Was felled by its stroke, and lay by the fens in beauty;
And there, O Venus, they say you came
With hair dishevelled.

But in vain will you try to recall my silent spirit;
For, Cynthia, how can my crumbled bones
Pretend to answer?

II. 14A Disdainfulness the Key to Success

Less keen was Agamemnon's joy at the triumph
Of Greece and the fall of Troy's inherited might;
Less keen Ulysses' delight when, his wandering over,
He reached his beloved Ithaca's shore;
Or Electra's on seeing Orestes safe when she,
His sister, had wept over ashes she'd thought were his;
Or Ariadne's at Theseus' return unharmed,
Having ruled his steps through the maze by the guiding thread:
Less keen was all their joy than mine last night.
If another such night shall follow, why then
I shall join the immortals!

Yet while in supplication I bowed my head,
I was reckoned of less account than a dried-up cistern.
But now she neither seeks occasion to treat me
With petulant scorn, nor can sit unmoved
When I voice a grievance.

If only I'd earlier known the terms of success!
To a dead man's ashes now is the remedy given.
The way shone bright for my feet but my eyes were blind;
But who in love's madness retains his sight?
I have learnt the cure: you lovers, be full of disdain!
So she who refused yesterday will come today.
On my loved one's door others knocked and called her name;
Unheeding, with me she stayed, her head at rest
On my arm: a victory greater than Parthia conquered.
Here are my spoils, my royal captives,
My triumphal chariot.

O Queen of Cythera, I'll hang on your temple pillar
Rich gifts and then write these verses signed with my name:
'In your honour, O Goddess, these spoils are laid at your shrine
By me, Propertius, received in love
A whole night through!'

Π.14B A fragment: perhaps an afterthought

And now, my love, it's for you to say if my ship
Shall come safely to shore or stick fast with its freight in the
 shallows;
But if by chance, through something for which I'm to blame,
You should change towards me, may I lie dead
Before your door!

Π.15 A Night of True Love

O bountiful fortune! O this my radiant night!
And you, dear bed of mine, that my raptures have hallowed!
So much in the light of the lamps we said to each other;
Such struggles there were when the light was dimmed!
For now she bared her breasts and encountered with me;
Now, veiling herself in her tunic, delayed my sallies.
And, when my eyes were drowsing, her lips unclosed them:
'O lazy one', she murmured, 'to lie like this!'
How with ever changing clasp we entwined our arms!
And on those lips of yours my kisses—
How long they lingered!

Loving debased to blind motions holds no joy;
The eyes, you must surely know, show love the way.
Paris was lost, they say, as soon as he saw
Helen rise naked from Menelaüs' bed;
And Endymion too in his nakedness took captive
Apollo's sister and so he lay
With the naked Goddess.

But if you are obdurate, going dressed to bed,
I shall tear off your clothes; you will feel the force of my hands;
And if indeed my anger carries me on,
You will have bruised arms for your mother to see!
It's not as though drooping breasts debarred you from love-play;
Let that worry her who's ashamed to have given birth.
While the Fates allow, let our eyes have their fill of love;
The long night comes and then the day
Returns no more.

Were you only ready to bind us in this embrace
With a chain no future day could ever loosen!
Take doves for your model, joined together in love,
Male and female a self-sufficient marriage.
He errs who expects the madness of love to end;
Love that is true can know no measure.
The earth will sooner produce an unnatural crop
To mock the farmer; the sun drive horses of darkness;
Rivers start calling their waters back to the source,

Or fish in a dried-up sea be stranded,
Than I could transfer my loving cares elsewhere.
In life I shall always be hers; in death
I shall be hers still.

If she's ready to grant me nights like this in her company
A year of my life will be equal to an age;
If she lets me have many, why then I shall be immortal.
Who in just one such night could fail
To become a god?

If all had a mind to live a life like mine
And with limbs much wine encumbers take their rest,
There would be no cruel steel nor ships of war,
And Actium's waves would not buffet our bones;
Nor would Rome, beset by the triumphs of civil war,
Have grown so tired of unbinding her hair in grief.
For this at least our descendants can justly praise us:
The cups we emptied never roused
The Gods to anger.

While the light yet lasts, my love, enjoy life's fruits;
If you give me all your kisses, they're still too few.
And just as petals fall from a wilting chaplet
And are scattered around and float in the bowls of wine,
So for us too who now breathe love's proud spirit
Perhaps the fate that comes tomorrow
Will close our days.

II.16 A Rival from Abroad

From Illyria, Cynthia, comes your praetor friend,
For you a rich spoil, for me a profound anxiety.
Could his ship not have struck a rock and gone to perdition?
Ah, Neptune, then what an offering would have been yours!
Now splendid banquets are given and I'm not asked;
And now all night your door stands open—
But not for me.

If you have any sense don't miss the harvest offered;
Despoil the stupid beast of his heavy fleece.
Then, when you've used up his presents and left him a pauper,
Tell him to take his leave and sail
To other Illyrias.

Of rank and honours Cynthia takes no heed;
But she's ever the one to weigh a lover's purse.
Always she's sending me down to the sea for pearls,
Or calling for purple cloth from Tyre itself.
Can anyone, then, for a gift or two buy love?
Jupiter, how unworthy the price
Of a girl's corruption!

I wish there were no rich men at Rome; that Caesar
Could live like the Kings of old in a hut of thatch:
Then sweethearts would never sell themselves for gifts,
And a girl would grow grey in the home of one lover;
Nor would you ever sleep for seven whole nights
Away from my bed, white arms round a man so vile—
And not because I've wronged you (I call you to witness),
But just because beauty and levity ever
Went hand in hand.

That savage once jigged about, for sale in the market,
And shook his loins—now he's rich and possesses my kingdom.
But you now, Venus, help me in my distress:
Let him burst his manhood's strength asunder
With his ceaseless lusting!

Will no ill-usage end my yearning for you?
Is my anguish to wait forever on your sins?

So many days have passed since I lost all taste
For the theatre, the sports of the Campus, the table's pleasures.
It should shame me, yes; unless what they say is true
And love is deaf to all talk of disgrace.
Consider that captain who, though his soldiers were doomed,
Lately filled Actium's waters with futile clamour:
Base passion it was that made him turn his back
And, wheeling his ships about, seek refuge
At the ends of the earth.

But all the dresses that fellow has given you, all
The emeralds, all the yellow-gleaming chrysolites—
May I see the rushing tempest carry them off
Far into the void; may they turn to earth and water!
Think of the bitterness gifts brought Eriphyle;
Of the gown Creüsa the bride was given
And her fiery torments.

Jupiter does not forever placidly smile
On perjured lovers or turn a deaf ear to prayers.
You've heard the thunder traverse the sky and seen
The lightning leap from the hall of heaven.
The Pleiads are not the cause nor rainy Orion;
And not for nothing the wrath of the thunderbolt falls.
No: at such times Jove punishes perjured girls,
For, deceived himself, he knows what it is to weep.
Do not, then, set such store by purple dresses
That, whenever the South Wind brings the storm-clouds,
You must go in dread.

II.17 Constancy under Stress

To make lying assignations, to cheat a lover
With promises—this is to stain your hands with blood.
Of such wrongs my poems tell each time that I'm left
Forlorn, to toss and turn in anguish
Through bitter nights.

You may pity Tantalus' lot when, in the river,
The water retreats from his lips and mocks his thirst,
Or marvel at Sisyphus' labours as he rolls
The intractable stone up the mountain side;
But in all the world nothing suffers like a lover,
And, if you are wise, there's nothing you would not
Prefer to be.

Lately, in envy and wonder, they called me happy;
Now I'm admitted hardly once in ten days,
Forbidden even to sleep, in the moon's clear light,
By her house at the crossroads, or whisper a message
Through the chinks of her door.

I would gladly, you wanton, hurl myself from a crag,
Or take in my hand the poisonous powder.
Yet in spite of it all I'll never change my loved one;
Some day my constancy will stir her
And then she'll weep.

II.18A A fragment

The Value of holding one's Tongue

From constant complaining hatred grows ; but often,
When a man stays silent, a woman will be appeased.
If there's something you've seen, then always deny you've seen it ;
If something hurts you, always deny that it hurts.

II.18B True Love scorns the Years

If hoary years had brought me a glint of silver,
And wrinkles cleft my sagging cheeks—what then?
But Aurora felt no scorn for old Tithonus,
Nor ever let him lie alone
In their ancient home.

Often on her return and before unyoking
And grooming her horses, she fondled him in her embrace ;
By India's bounds, when she slept with her arms around him,
She complained that the day returned too soon ;
Then, mounting her chariot, called the Gods unkind,
And performed her task for the world with grudging heart.
Despite his age, her joy in the living Tithonus
Surpassed her heavy grief at the loss
Of Memnon, their son.

A girl so lovely felt it no shame to sleep
With age and lavish kisses on locks grown grey ;
While you, false girl, has turned against me in my youth,
Doomed yourself to be all too soon
A bent old woman.

II.18c Beauty needs no Make-up

Are you now so mad that you ape the painted Briton
And play the coquette with hair of exotic sheen?
Looks are best when left as nature made them;
Belgian rouge is a horrid stain
On Roman faces.

In Hades much evil, I trust, awaits the girl
Whose hair, with its changing hues, tells tasteless lies;
Or because some girl or other sports sky-blue tresses,
Are sky-blue tresses then to be reckoned
A fashion to follow?

Away with such nonsense! You're lovely just as you are;
Quite lovely enough for me if you come to me often.
And since you have neither brother nor son to guard you,
Let me take the places of both and be
Your son and your brother.

May the thought of the bed we have shared be your constant
shield;
And do not be eager to flaunt yourself, all made up.
What gossip says I'll believe, so give it no cause;
And scandal, remember, leaps across
Both land and sea.

II.19 Less Danger in the Country

Though I hate to see you leave Rome and me, my Cynthia,
I'm glad it's for a secluded rural retreat.
Those innocent meadows will harbour no young seducers
Whose wiles allow you no chance to be true.
Rivals will not brawl beneath your windows
And disturb your sleep by calling out your name.
No, Cynthia: there you'll be left on your own to gaze
At lonely hills, and flocks, and the lands
Of peasant farmers.

There no public shows will have power to corrupt you,
No temples will furnish pretexts for sins;
There you will watch the diligent oxen plough
And the vine yield up its locks to the cunning sickle;
And there to a simple shrine you'll take rare incense,
And at the farmers' altar offer a kid.
Then, lifting your skirt, you will trip a country measure,
First making sure that all is safe
From prying townsmen.

For my part I mean to hunt; already my joy
Is to worship Diana, forgetting my vows to Venus.
I will snare wild beasts whose antlers I'll hang on a pine-tree;
I will show the brave hounds the proper way.
Not that I'll venture to tackle fearsome lions
Or dash into battle face to face with wild boars;
I shall think myself bold if I draw an arrow to shoot
At a bird, or lie in watch for the gentle hare—
There where amongst his woods Clitumnus hides
His lovely stream whose waves keep pure
The snow-white cattle.

Remember, my dear, should you think of trying something,
That I shall be there when a few more days have dawned.
Then neither the lonely groves nor the brooks that wander
Down mossy crags can divert my mind
So that my tongue shall cease to repeat your name;
For there's none that will not take advantage
Of an absent lover.

II.20 Loyalty till Death: a Promise

Why do you weep, more woe-begone than Briseïs
Torn from her love, or Andromachë, war's sad captive?
Why, mad girl, do you weary the Gods with stories
Of my falsehood and how I have broken faith?
Less piercing the plaintive song of the nightingale
As she moans in the Attic darkness among the leaves;
Less bitter Niobë's tears that down the sad rocks
Of Sipylus flow for the children's graves
That her arrogance wrought.

Suppose that my arms were bound with brazen bands,
Or that you, my love, were immured in Danaë's tower,
Yet would I find a way to you, bursting asunder
The brazen chains and leaping over
The walls of iron.

To all the gossip about you my ears are deaf;
Harbour, then, no doubts of my sincerity.
By my mother's bones I swear, by the bones of my father
(And if I lie, may both their spirits plague me!),
Yours, my dear, I shall be till the final darkness:
One love for us, one day to take us
Both hence away.

But if your fame could not hold me nor your beauty,
Then would your kindly dominion have the power.
Full moon comes round in the course of its seventh circuit,
And no street corner but buzzes of you and me.
Meanwhile quite often I've found your door indulgent,
Quite often enjoyed the freedom of your bed.
Yet not one night was purchased with costly gifts;
Whatever I was I owed to your gracious heart.
Wanted yourself by so many, you were the one
Who wanted me: can I ever forget your goodness?
If I do, may the Furies of tragedy come and torment me;
May Aeäcus, judge of the dead, condemn;
Like Tityus may I be prey to a raging vulture,
Or, doomed to Sisyphean tasks,
Toil vainly forever.

Nor do you need to beseech me with suppliant letters;
At the end I shall still be as loyal as at the start.
This is the changeless law for me, that alone
Of lovers I neither begin in rashness
Nor cease in haste.

II.21 Learn from Experience

So Panthus has sent you a lying note about me:
To the same extent may Venus be his enemy!
But wasn't my prophecy true as Dodona's oracle?
Your wonderful lover has found himself a wife!
All those nights you've wasted! Aren't you ashamed?
He sings at large; too trustful, you sleep alone.
Between those two you're the butt, the braggart's theme:
At home to him often, he says, when he didn't want you!
May I fall down dead if he has any other aim
Than to glory over you; now, the husband,
He's won his applause.

Thus Jason betrayed Medea, once his protectress;
Out of the house he thrust her, for now Creüsa
Held him fast. Thus, too, Calypso's hopes
Were foiled when she saw Ulysses her lover
Set sail and go.

Learn, you girls who lend too ready an ear
And are now forlorn, to be less free with your favours.
You also, for you have been seeking one who'll be true:
Your first experience, silly girl, should teach you
To take more care. Now I, in every place,
At every time, in health or sickness—
I'm always yours!

Π.22A Susceptibility

All those girls, Demophoön, yesterday—
You know how they charmed me, and into what troubles I fall.
There isn't a street I can walk along unscathed,
And the theatre was made expressly to ruin me.
For there with voluptuous gesture a girl extends
White arms, or sings an air full of trilling notes;
And my eyes meanwhile seek out their own destruction
Should a pretty girl be sitting there
With bosom uncovered or errant locks escaping
From their clasp of Indian jewels to stray
Across her smooth forehead.

You ask, Demophoön, why my heart melts so
For every girl—but love admits no 'why'.
There are people who slash at their arms with sacral knives
To the maddening notes of Phrygian pipes.
Nature gives each at birth his peculiar folly;
To me it has fallen to be forever in love.
Though I suffered the fate of Thamyras, poet of fable,
And lost my sight, I should never be blind
To a pretty girl.

But if I seem to you thin and shrunken of limb,
You're mistaken: the rites of Venus involve no labour.
And since you ask, let me say that many a girl
Has known my attentions to last the whole night long.
For Alcmena's sake Jove stayed the course of the Bear,
And twice the night sky lacked its king;
Yet he did not go languid back to hurl the lightning,
Love's powers are never impaired by love itself.
What of Achilles quitting the arms of Briseïs?
Did the Trojans fly less fast from Thessalian spears?
What of fierce Hector leaving Andromachë's bed?
Had the Mycenean ships less dread of battle?
Each had strength to demolish fleets or walls;
And in love a proper Achilles am I
And no less a fierce Hector.

Now the sun attends the sky and now the moon,
And so for me one girl is not enough.

Let one of them hold and caress me with eager arms
Whenever another will grant me no place.
And if it happens that one is roused to anger,
Let her know there's another girl who wants to be mine.
For a ship is more firmly held by a pair of cables;
And an anxious mother feels the safer
If she's rearing twins.

II.22B Broken Trysts

If you mean to be cruel, say 'no'; if not, then come!
Why do you take such pleasure in using
Just empty words?

This is the bitterest trial of all for a lover—
That his hopes should be suddenly dashed by a broken tryst.
He sighs and he tosses here and there in his bed;
He orders that now she be not admitted;
And then again he wearies his slave with questions,
Bidding him speak the further tidings
He dreads to hear.

II.23 Never Lose your Freedom

To me, who once shunned the path of the ignorant crowd,
Even a draught from a roadside cistern
Now has its sweetness.

Is a freeborn man to hand to another's slave
Money for bringing his mistress's promised message,
Forever having to ask which colonnade
Shades her today or which park she strolls in?
Then, when you've borne all Hercules' fabled labours,
She sends to ask what present you have to offer.
All this just to look on her guardian's surly visage,
Or, surprised, to hide in a squalid hovel.
High price for a night that comes round only once a year!
Bad luck, I say, to whoever takes pleasure
In bolted doors!

But the girl who walks at large with her cloak flung back,
Fenced round with no fearsome guards—she's the one that pleases.
Yes, she who in muddy shoes tramps the Sacred Way,
And makes no delay when someone accosts her.
She will not put you off or glibly demand
Such a sum as your stingy father would groan to give you;
She will not say 'I'm scared! Get up! Make haste!
You're out of luck: today my husband
Returns from the country.'

Let the girls the Euphrates and those the Orontes have sent
Be my pleasure; no shamefaced thefts of love for me!
And since no kind of freedom remains for a lover,
He who lets himself fall in love
Is a slave and no freeman.

II.24A Exculpatory

'Such talk from you, whose famous book of Cynthia
Has made you a favourite theme of gossip
All over the city!'

At these words whose brow would not be bedewed with sweat?
One must either have no shame or conceal one's love.
But if Cynthia's smiles were really favouring me,
I should not be named the master of dissipation,
Nor exposed to disgrace through the length and breadth of Rome.
I would hide, by the counterfeit name of 'Cynthia',
The love that consumed me.

No wonder, then, that I go after low-priced girls:
I incur less scandal—a reason, surely,
You will not judge trivial.

II.24B Low-priced Girls can be Tiresome

What a girl! Now she wants a fan of proud peacock's feathers,
And now a hard crystal ball to cool her hands;
Now she makes me, full of vexation, buy ivory dice,
And suchlike worthless baubles that glitter
On the Sacred Way.

Damn it, it's not the money that makes me angry;
But it shames me to think I shall be a butt
For that cheating Cynthia.

II.24C Deserted but still Faithful

Was it, then, for this that my heart was to sing for joy?
Are you not ashamed, so lovely and yet so fickle?
After no more than a night or two of love
You declare that I only burden your bed.
Just now you were full of praise as you read my poems;
Does that love of yours turn round so soon
And fly elsewhere?

Let him match me—your new-found friend—for talent or art;
And first let him learn to keep his love for one house.
Let him fight, if you like, Lernean hydras, or fetch you
Golden apples a dragon guards.
Let him swallow down rank poisons; be shipwrecked and drink
Salt waves, nor ever refuse to bear all for you
(If only, my dear, you would try me at such tasks!):
Soon would this braggart be numbered among the cowards—
He whose bombast has gained him in your sight
Such inflated honour; and by next year
You'll be finally parted.

But me a Sibyl's whole lifetime will not alter
Nor the labours of Hercules nor that day of darkness.
As you compose my ashes you'll say, 'Are these,
My Sextus, yours? Alas, you were true to me;
Yes—alas!—you were always true, though not ennobled
By ancestral blood nor yet, like some,
By abundance of riches.'

There's nothing I will not suffer; no wrong will change me;
I deem it no burden to bear with a lovely girl
That beauty of yours, I'm sure, has had plenty of victims,
But I'm sure as well that few have kept faith.
For a brief space only Theseus loved Ariadne,
Demophoön Phyllis—both ungrateful guests.
And you know how Jason's ship carried off Medea
And how he, the husband she'd lately saved,
Was then to forsake her.

The girl is heartless who feigns a false love for many,
And decks herself out for more than one.
And do not compare me with noble or wealthy lovers ;
On the final day who'll be there to gather your bones?
I shall be he ; but how much rather, I pray,
May you bare your breast and let down your hair
To mourn for me !

II.25 One Girl is More than Enough

Fairest of girls, born specially to bring me sorrow—
For it's not my luck to hear you say 'Come often'—
My books shall win for that loveliness of yours,
(By your leave, Catullus, and yours too, Calvus)
A fame unrivalled.

The soldier, full of years, now takes his ease,
His arms laid by; the old ox now ploughs no more;
On the empty sands lies the rotting hulk at rest;
The old battle-shield hangs idle on the temple wall.
But even though I should live as long as Tithonus
Or Nestor, age will not abstract me
From my love for you.

It were surely better to serve a ruthless tyrant
Or groan in cruel Perillus's brazen bull;
Better to be turned to stone by the Gorgon's stare,
Or bear with Prometheus those ravening birds.
Yet I mean to stay constant. Rust corrodes the blade
Of steel; unceasing drops will wear out flint.
But a loved one's accusations do not impair
The love that abides, unmoved by unmerited threats.
The lover pleads though spurned; takes the blame though wronged;
Yes, back he comes, unasked, on feet
Themselves unwilling.

You too, so proud in the fulness, as you suppose,
Of your love, remember that no girl long stays steady.
Who in the midst of the storm fulfils his vows
Although in port there often floats shattered wreckage?
Or demands the prize before his wheel has grazed
The last turning post and the race is run?
The winds that seem to favour love are liars;
They mock you, and then, when ruin comes late,
It is ruin indeed.

And meanwhile, however much your sweetheart loves you,
Lock your joy away in your silent heart;
For somehow or other boastful words in love
Always redound to a lover's ruin.

Though she asks you often, remember to go but once.
Things for which one is envied never
Last for long.

If the ways that girls once favoured still prevailed,
I should be successful like you : the times defeat me.
But no modern spirit shall redirect my life.
Let each man have the sense to take
The road that suits him.

You others, who give your devotion first to one love
And then to another—what anguish torments your eyes !
You see a sweet young girl, a perfect blonde ;
You see a brunette : and both complexions charm you.
You see a girl of Grecian form pass by ;
You see Roman girls : and both forms take you captive.
One wears peasant dress, one rich vermilion :
Through both you suffer a mortal wound.
Since just one woman can take all sleep from your eyes,
One woman suffices to bring each lover
His fill of miseries.

II.26A A Nightmare

In a dream I saw you, my dearest, your ship all shattered,
Struggling amidst the Ionian foam with hands
Exhausted; and now you confessed all the lies you'd told me,
Though unable to lift up your hair so heavy with brine:
Like Hellë when, from the golden ram's soft back
On which she was riding, she fell and was tossed
In the purple waves.

How great was my fear that, like her, you might give your name
To a sea where sailors, remembering you, would weep!
What vows I made to Neptune, to Castor and Pollux,
To the Goddess Leucothoë, once a woman!
Yet you hardly raised your hands above the flood,
And often, as one on the point of death,
You called on my name.

Had Glaucus the Sea-God happened to glimpse your eyes,
He'd have made you a nymph of the wide Ionian sea;
And the Nereïds in their envy would have reviled you—
Nesaea the gleaming white, and Cynothoë
Of the sea-green hair.

But—behold!—a dolphin dashed to your rescue—the same,
I'm sure, that once saved Arion and his lyre.
And now I was making ready to leap right down
From the top of the cliff when my very terrors
Scattered my fantasies.

II.26B Love's Secret

Now let them marvel to see so lovely a girl
My very slave, and my puissance famed through the City.
Not though Cambyses returned or the golden river
Of Croesus, would she tell me, her poet,
To depart from her bed.

She declares as she reads my verse that she hates rich men;
No girl reveres and honours poetry more.
Loyalty is love's true secret, and constancy;
Let others with lots of gifts to lavish
Have their many affairs.

II.260 A Projected Voyage

Does my loved one think of sailing far over the sea?
I will go too: one breeze shall propel us both;
One beach for true lovers to sleep on beneath one tree,
And often one spring where we both shall drink;
One plank to afford us both a resting place,
Whether we make our bed together
At the prow or the stern.

All ills I will bear: let the fierce East wind oppress us,
The wintry South wind blow us I don't know where.
Come all the winds that harassed poor Ulysses,
Or, off Euboea, the thousand ships of Greece,
Or that moved the clashing rocks that time that a dove
Was sent to act as the Argo's guide
In an unknown sea.

If only my love may be always before my eyes,
Then Jove himself is welcome to blast the ship.
Cast naked on shore, at least we shall lie together;
Or so long as the earth covers her, let the waves
Take me where they please.

Yet Neptune would never frown on so great a love;
He's a match in love for Jove, his brother.
When Amymone, to win the promised water,
Gave herself to him, his trident struck its mark:
Yes, to the girl he'd embraced he kept his word;
From her golden urn the God-given water flowed.
And Orithyia, whom Boreas carried off,
Never called him cruel—this God who tames
Both land and deep sea.

Scylla for us will surely abate her rage,
And wild Charybdis that ceaselessly ebbs and flows.
The very stars will never be veiled in night;
Bright will Orion shine and bright the Kid.
And what if I yield up my life as I lie in your arms?
An end like this will surely bring me
Nothing but honour.

II.27 Only the Lover Knows

You mortals seek to know the uncertain hour
Of your funeral rites, and the road by which death comes;
You seek through the arts of Phoenicia to know which stars
In the cloudless sky bring good to men,
And which bring ill.

If we hunt the Britons by ship, the Parthians on foot,
By sea or by land, dark perils beset the way;
Or when Mars joins citizen armies in wavering conflict,
You deplore that your life is exposed to the tumult;
Then you fear the flames, you fear the collapse, that menace
Your home; you fear lest you put to your lips
The cup that brings darkness.

The lover alone, knowing when and how he will perish,
Fears neither the North Wind's blast nor enemy arms.
Though already, a rower, he sits by the reeds of Styx,
And views the sad sails of the boat that ferries the dead,
If only the breath of his loved one's cry recalls him,
Back by the route all laws forbid
He will make his way.

II.28 A Perilous Sickness

A. Danger does not yet Threaten: a Prayer to Jupiter

Take pity, Jove, on the girl who lies here sick;
The death of one so lovely would be a crime.
Juno, your wife, will forgive you for granting aid.
Her jealousy is overborne
When a girl's life fades.

This is the season of scorching, sweltering air,
When the parched earth seems to glow in the Dog-star's gleam.
But the fervent sky is less to blame than she
Who has failed so often to honour the Gods.

This, as of old, is the ruin of wretched girls:
All their vows are carried away
On the wind and the wave.

Was Venus aggrieved to find you compared to her?
Of every rival in beauty she's equally jealous.
Did you show no respect for Palasgian Juno's temple?
Or dare to disparage Pallas's eyes?
Fair women have never learnt to spare their words.
From your tongue's offence and from your beauty
Your sickness comes.

But when your life, beset by so many dangers,
Reaches its close, a gentler hour will come.
Io, who once was changed to a cow and lowed
By the waters of Nile, became a Goddess.
Ino roamed the earth in her youth, but now
Is Leucothoë, she to whom poor sailors pray.
Andromeda too, the sea-beast's promised victim,
Became instead great Perseus' noble wife;
And Callisto, who once was a bear and ranged the meadows
Of Arcady, now guides ships in the night
By the light of her stars.

But if fate should chance to hasten your time of quiet—
A fate lugubrious, yes, but not unblest—
To Semele you will tell of beauty's dangers,
And she will concur, a girl misfortune taught;
And among the Homeric heroines you will receive
The foremost place by consent of all.
Now, stricken, yield as best you may to fate:
The Gods and the very day of doom
May thus be averted.

**B. Desperate Danger now: Magic has failed; will
Jupiter hear?**

The wheel is still that whirled to a witch's chant;
On the sacred hearth the ash of the laurel lies cold;
The moon, now weary of all the spells, refuses
To descend from the sky; and the bird of night
Sounds death's dire omen.

One fateful boat, setting dusky sails for the pools
Of the Dead, will carry us two and our love away.
O Jove, if for one there's no pity, I ask it for two!
I live if she lives; if she dies I die.
Grant but my prayer and a holy hymn I vow:
'By the might of Jove', I'll write, 'my loved one's saved.'
And before your feet she will take her place in worship,
And seated there will tell the story
Of her long-drawn peril.

c. Danger seems Past; to the King and Queen of the Underworld

This mercy of yours, Persephone—may it continue,
And may your husband too be no less kind!
In the Underworld there are many thousand beauties;
If it's lawful, then, let one fair girl
Remain on earth.

Iope's with you and snowy Tyro too;
With you Europa and shameless Pasiphaë
And all the beauties of ancient Troy and Greece—
Of Thebes and old Priam's city, those fallen realms.
And every Roman girl who was honoured like them
Has gone. Yes, all alike belong
To the greedy pyre.

For no one does beauty or fortune last forever.
Nearer or farther off stands death
And waits for all.

d. Thanksgiving for Recovery

Since, dearest heart, you've escaped so dire a peril,
To Diana render dances, the offerings due;
And honour with vigils her who, once a heifer,
Is now a Goddess; and keep for me
Ten votive nights.

II.29A Apprehended by Amoretti

Last night, my dear, as I wandered, fuddled with wine,
Nor had any servant's hand to guide my steps,
I met a crowd of tiny boys—how many
I cannot say, being far too scared to count.
Some were holding torches, others arrows,
And others again had chains all ready,
As it seemed, for me.

All were naked. One, forward beyond the rest,
Cried: 'Seize him; we know him now; yes he's the one;
An angry girl has committed him into our hands.'
And as soon as he'd spoken I felt a noose
Around my neck.

Let them thrust me now, one ordered, into the middle;
Cried another: 'Death to him who denies we're Gods!
This girl has waited, you undeserving fool,
Whole hours for you who were seeking another's door.
Why, when she unties the strings of the net that holds
Her hair and lifts her sleep-heavy eyes,
There will breathe upon you perfumes Arabian spices
Never produced but such as Love made
With his very own hands.

'Now spare him, brothers; he swears his love will be true;
And see! here's the house to which we were told to bring him.'
And they spoke, as they straightened my clothes, these final words:
'Go now; and mind that on future nights
You stay at home!'

II.29B Spies come to No Good

It was morning : the wish possessed me to see if Cynthia
Slept alone. And alone in her bed she lay.
In wonder I gazed ; she had never seemed more lovely ;
Not even when, in her purple dress,
She went to tell her dreams to Vesta, the Chaste One,
For fear they portended harm to her or me :
So fair she seemed to me now, just freed from sleep.
How great is the power of radiant beauty
Quite unadorned !

‘What now, you early-morning spy on your sweetheart?
Do you think my ways are the same as yours?
I am not so fickle ; for me one lover’s enough—
Either you or someone else who contrives to be truer.
Look ! no impressions or traces here in my bed ;
No signs two lay and rolled together !
In the whole of my body no agitation of breath
Such as you too well know betrays
The act of adultery.’

She ended ; then up she jumped, repelling my kisses
With hand opposed, and on slippered feet stalked off.
So, pure love’s would-be guardian, I became
The fool ; nor since have I enjoyed
One happy night.

II.30A No Escape from Love

Where, poor fool, are you flying? There’s no escape.
Go all the way to the Don, Love still will pursue.
Though high in the air you are borne on Pegasus’ back,
Or the wings of Perseus speed your feet ;
Though you cleave with your sandals the winds that rush you
along,
Yet will Mercury’s lofty road
Be of no avail.

Over the lover's head Love's always hovering
And weighing down the neck that once was free.
He keeps watch too—no stricter guard—nor lets you
Lift your eyes from the ground, once caught.
And yet, should you ever transgress, he can be appeased,
Provided your prayers to be forgiven
Are prompt and true.

II.30B Loving is no Crime

Strait-laced elders are free to denounce love's revels,
If only, my dear, we may tread our intended road.
Their ears are burdened with out-of-date conventions:
It's time for the poet's deft pipe to sound—
The pipe that Pallas unjustly threw in the shallows
Of Meänder on seeing how ugly she looked
With her cheeks inflated.

Should it shame me to spend my life just loving one sweetheart?
If this is to be a crime, it's the crime of Love.
Let none charge me! Come, dwell with me, my Cynthia,
In dewy glens on Helicon's moss-grown heights.
There you shall see the Muses hang from the crags
As they sing of the love-thefts Jove found sweet:
How, now on fire for Semele, now he was mad
For Io, and how as an eagle he flew
To the hall of Troy.

But if no one has ever conquered Love in arms,
Why for a general offence am I indicted?
Those Holy Maidens, demure of countenance,
Will not be ruffled: they know what it is to love;
At least if the story is true that one of them lay
With a God who took the form of Oeägrus
In rocky Bistonia.

And when they have stationed you in the foremost rank
Of their dance, and there stands Bacchus, wand in hand,
I will let the holy ivy clusters hang
Down from my forehead, for, without you,
My talent is nothing.

II.31 The New Temple of Phoebus Apollo

Why, you ask, am I late. Today great Caesar
Opened Apollo's golden colonnade:
A magnificent sight with its columns of African marble,
And the fifty daughters of aged Danaüs
Standing between.

In the middle rose the temple, of splendid marble,
Dearer to Phoebus than Delos where he was born;
Above the pediment stood the Sun's quadriga;
And the doors, of Libyan ivory nobly carved,
On one side showed the Gauls cast down from Parnassus,
And on the other the sorrowful deaths
Of Niobe's daughters.

And there, in marble, between his mother and sister,
Was the Pythian God, long-robed and as though in song;
More beautiful even than Phoebus himself he seemed,
With lips ever parted and silent lyre.
And round about the altar four oxen stood,
So cunningly wrought by Myron's hand
That they seemed alive.

II.32 An Equivocal Acquittal

He sins who sees you; those to whom you're unseen
Will not desire you; all blame must fall on the eyes.
Why do you go to consult the evasive oracle
At Praeneste? Why take the road to Tusculum's walls?
Why does your chariot carry you off to Tibur
So often, or follow the Appian Way
As far as Lanuvium?

Not grand enough, I suppose, are the shady columns
Of Pompey's portico, curtained with cloth of gold;
Or the avenue lined with even rows of plane-trees,
Or the jets that from slumbering Maro's statue gush,
And then go lightly chattering round the basin,
To be all of a sudden reabsorbed
Into Triton's mouth.

If only, Cynthia, here in your leisure hours
You would take your walks ! But all say you're not to be trusted ;
For they see you hasten, amid the blaze of the torches,
To Aricia's grove with the brand you have vowed
To the Goddess of Crossroads.

You fool only yourself ; your journeys reveal an intrigue ;
From my eyes, mad girl, not the City, you seek to escape.
You will not succeed ; you contrive a futile stratagem ;
Of old I know all about the wiles
You ineptly practise.

But for me it's no matter ; the hurt to your own good name
Will, wretched girl, be as great as your actions merit.
For lately a rumour has been assailing my ears ;
It runs all through the City and speaks
No good of you.

But you need never believe a hostile tongue !
Scandal was always the penalty of the fair.
No poisoning's come to light and damned your good name ;
Apollo will witness how clean are your hands.
But a night or two of long-drawn amorous sport—
Never suppose that I'm upset
By such peccadilloes !

Why Helen for love of a stranger exchanged her country
And, uncondemned, was brought back safely home ;
Venus herself, it's said, was seduced by Mars,
And yet had no less honour in heaven.
Mount Ida too will tell of her love for a shepherd,
With whom she lay, a Goddess, among his sheep,
While the Hamadryad sisters all looked on
And the elderly satyrs led by Father Silenus ;
And with them there in Ida's glens the Naiad
Caught the apples as down they fell
Into outstretched hands.

With such a swarm of wantons who bothers to ask
Why one of them's rich or whence her riches came ?
Rome, your good luck today would exceed all bounds
If just one girl were to flout the custom.
Lesbia, love of Catullus, before my Cynthia
With impunity did the same. A successor
Incurs the less odium.

Who looks for old-fashioned men of the Tatius stamp,
Or strait-laced Sabines, but lately came to our City.
Sooner could you dry up the waves of the sea,
Or with mortal hand pull down the stars,
Than bring it about that our girls refrain from sin.
That was the way in the days when Saturn reigned;
But after Deucalion's flood submerged the world,
And since that ancient flood subsided,
Tell me, has anyone kept his bed unsullied?
Has any Goddess managed to live
Alone with one God?

The wife of King Minos, they say, was in olden days
Seduced by a fierce great bull of snowy splendour;
And Danaë too, though begirt by a brazen wall,
Couldn't be chaste and deny great Jove.
But if you go taking the women of Greece and Rome
For models, why then acquitted by me,
Live just as you please!

II.33A The Dismal Cult of Isis

Once more the dismal festival comes round;
Ten nights has Cynthia now consumed in worship.
A curse on the rites that from the sultry Nile
Isis has sent to the matrons of Italy!—
The Goddess who parts so many eager lovers,
And has always, whatever her name has been,
Shown the same ill nature.

But surely, as Io, you learnt in your secret intrigue
With Jove what it means to embark on many wanderings,
When Juno commanded that you, a girl, grow horns,
And exchange your speech for a cow's harsh bellow.
How often the oak-leaves bruised your mouth; how often
There in your stall you chewed the cud
From the arbutus tree!

Because Jove took your farmyard looks away—
Is this why you've now become so haughty a Goddess?
Are Egypt's swarthy worshippers not enough?

Must you take the road to distant Rome?
Does it profit you that our girls should sleep alone?
Take it from me, your horns will grow again;
Yes, cruel one, we'll expel you from our City.
Never has there been any goodwill
Between Nile and Tiber.

But, Cynthia, since my privations have more than appeased you,
Let us, after these empty nights,
Thrice stay love's course.

II.33B Proof against Dissipation

You do not listen—my words are a waste of time,
Though the Ploughman turns his team of slow-paced stars.
Unmoved you drink. Does midnight never quell you?
Surely your hand is now too weary
To throw the dice.

A curse on the man who discovered the power of the grape,
And by the admixture of wine first spoiled good water!
Justly was Icarus slain by the Attic farmers
And learnt how bitter the scent of the vine.
To the Centaur Eurytion, too, wine brought destruction,
And ruin for Polyphemos came
Through the wine of Thrace.

Beauty is ravaged by wine and youth perverted;
Hardly, when drunk, does a girl know whom she loves.
But on you the amplest draughts have no effect.
Drink on! You are lovely still; wine does not harm you.
When down hangs your wreath to trail among the wine-cups,
And you read out my poems with voice subdued,
Then let the Falernian overflow and drench
The table, and foam in all its luxury
In the gilded goblets!

Yet no girl likes to retire to a lonely bed;
They all, at Love's instance, look for something more.
For the lover who's missing the tide of passion runs strong;
The length of his tenure serves to diminish
The constant lover.

II.34A Trust No One

Who to a friend would trust a loved one's beauty?
It was thus that my girl was nearly snatched away.
No one—I speak with knowledge—keeps faith in love;
If a girl is pretty, each wants her for himself.
The Love-God poisons kinships; sunders friends;
Calls to dire arms those in accord.
His welcomed guest took Menelaüs' wife;
Medea, to follow an unknown lover,
Left all behind.

What treachery, Lynceus, for you to touch my sweetheart!
Did not your hand fall impotently back?
Suppose she had not been so firm and true:
Could you have lived with so black a sin?
Run me through with steel; destroy me with poison;
Only keep your hands off the girl I love.
Be lord of my life, if you like—of my person too—
Partner, my friend, in all I own:
From my bed alone I require you to stay away;
There not Jove himself may be my rival.
When I'm alone my shadow makes me jealous—
Or nothing at all; like a fool I tremble
With no cause for fear.

For this one reason I pardon so base a crime:
That too much wine was what caused your words to stray.
But your moralist's furrowed brow will no more deceive me;
We all of us know by now the joy
Of being in love.

II.34B Learning never Helped a Lover

At this late date my Lynceus is madly in love!
I rejoice that you, above all, should worship my Gods.
What use to you now your books of Socratic lore,
Your discussions on how the universe goes?
What use the songs of that ancient poet of yours
Who offers no help at all to one in Love's power?
Better to take Philetas as your model,
Or Callimachus who, in those 'Dreams' of his,
Never flies too high.

You may tell once more your tale of Acheloüs,
The River God, and how he was broken for love;
Or how on the Phrygian plain the deceptive Meänder
Twists and turns and loses its way;
Or again how Arion, Adrastus' victorious horse,
Voiced his grief beside Archemorus' pyre:
These tales and those of Amphiaraüs' chariot
And Capaneus' ruin so welcome to Jove,
Will do you no good.

Write no more lofty poems buskin-shod;
Flex your muscles to dance to a sensuous measure.
Turn your verse on a narrow lathe, and stay,
Stern poet, within the bounds your passion sets you.
You are no more proof against love than Antimachus
Or Homer. A straight-limbed girl despises
Even mighty Gods.

But the ox will never submit to the cumbrous plough
Before he's been caught by the horns in the forceful noose.
So neither will you of yourself endure love's trials;
First of all I must tame your fierceness.
No woman wants to be told the plan of the world;
Why Apollo's chariot causes the moon to wane;
What's left of us after we cross the Stygian waves;
Or whether a purposeful hand directs
The crash of the lightning.

Consider my case: at home but a modest fortune.
No ancestors who triumphed in ancient wars;
Yet see how at dinners I lord it over the girls!
What raises me up is the very talent
That you decry.

π.34c Poetry, Heroic and Amorous

Let me, whom Cupid's sure aim has struck to the bone,
Languidly stretch myself here among yesterday's garlands.
It shall be for Vergil to tell of the Actian shore
That Phoebus guards, and of Caesar's gallant ships—
Vergil who brings before us the arms of Aeneas
And the walls to be built on Lavinian soil.
Yield, all you writers of Rome and writers of Greece;
Something greater has now been born
Than the Iliad even.

Yet, Vergil, you sing of Thyrsis and Daphnis too,
With their well-worn reed-pipes in shady Galaesus's pine-woods;
Of how ten apples suffice to win over a girl
And a kid just come from its mother's udder.
Happy, who buys a sweetheart cheap for apples!—
A girl from whom Tityrus' songs draw no response.
And happy Corydon too, who tried his luck
With Alexis, his master's darling, as yet unwon!
Though he's tired of piping now and takes his ease,
Yet among the compliant Hamadryads
He still has praise.

And now, like Hesiod, Ascrea's old poet, you tell us
In which fields the corn grows green, on which slopes the vine—
Such a song as the Cynthian God intones to his lyre
As his fingers sweep the cunning strings.
Yet will your songs of love be forever welcome
To everyone—experts in love, and novices too.
The melodious swan in such songs is just as inspired,
And if less loud, is far beyond reach
Of cackling geese.

Then Varro too, Leucadia's brightest flame,
His 'Jason' completed, played with themes of love;
And these are the themes on which gay Catullus wrote,
Whose Lesbia won more fame than Helen,
While learned Calvus too confessed his love,
Telling of how his poor Quintilia died;
And Gallus lately washed in Stygian waters
His many wounds at lovely Lycoris' hands.
No less in the verse of Propertius is Cynthia praised,
If Fate shall leave among these poets
A place for me.

Book III

III. I Posthumous Honour

Holy shades of Callimachus and Philetas,
Let me, I beg you, enter your sacred grove.
Priestlike I lead the way from the crystal spring
To adapt Italian rites to Grecian measures.
Tell me, which is the cave where together you wove
Your poems? What steps did you tread? Of what fountain
Did you drink the waters?

Away with the man who'd have Phoebus always in arms!
Let the verses go forward, finely wrought and polished,
Whereby Fame raises me high off the ground, and the Muse
I have fathered triumphs, her horses crowned with garlands,
While the little Loves ride with me in my chariot,
And a throng of writers follows my wheels.
Why, giving your horses their heads, do you vainly strive
To pass me? The road is far from wide
That leads to the Muses.

Many will add new glories to Roman annals;
Far Bactra, they'll sing, shall mark the Empire's bounds.
But my pages have brought a work, to be read in peace,
By a way untrodden, down from the Muses' mountain.
Now, Muses, give your poet a delicate wreath;
Be assured no overbearing chaplet
Will suit his head.

What the envious tongue takes from me while I live
With twofold interest posthumous fame will repay.
Yes, time makes all things greater after death;
When the funeral is over a name on men's lips
Sounds always louder.

Else who would know how a horse of pine-wood forced
A citadel? How two rivers fought with Achilles—
The Simoïs and the Scamander, offspring of Jove?
How the car-wheels thrice dragged Hector's corpse through the
mud?

Their native lands would scarcely have heard of the heroes
At Troy, or of Paris, that dubious warrior.
And little talk would there be of Troy today
And its citadel taken twice through the power
Of the God of Oeta.

So Homer, who told of the fall of Troy, has seen
The fame of his work increase with the passing years.
Me too the future sons of Rome will praise;
The day will come—I foretell it—after my pyre.
It has been ordained, for Apollo has heard my prayers:
The stone that marks my bones shall stand
At no grave men scorn.

III.2 Fame Outlasting the Pyramids

Let my songs meanwhile return to their own true orbit,
And my sweetheart, moved by familiar notes,
Be filled with delight.

Orpheus, they tell, with his Thracian lyre enchanted
The beasts of the wild and detained the rushing rivers;
From Mount Cithaeron music summoned to Thebes
Stones that formed themselves into a wall;
And Galatea, beneath fierce Etna, turned
Her dripping horses to where the Cyclops sang.
No wonder, then, with Apollo and Bacchus both
Favouring me, that a host of girls
Should revere my poems.

What if my house, unpropped by marble columns,
Boasts no ivory ceiling with gilded beams?
What if I have no orchard like that of Alcinoüs,
Nor elaborate grotto an aqueduct serves?
The Muses are yet my companions, my poems dear
To the reader, nor does Calliope tire
Of my choral dances.

Lucky the girl a book of mine has praised;
Of her beauty my poems shall be so many records.
Not costly pyramids stretching up to the stars
Nor Jove's Olympian mansion that vies with heaven
Nor the wealth of Mausolus' tomb can claim exemption
From the final obligation of death.
Fire or the rains despoil them of their glory;
Time's strokes defeat their mass and down they crash.
But a writer's talent wins fame that will not perish:
The honour accorded such talent stands
Beyond death's power.

III.3 The Love Poet's Vocation

Among Helicon's gentle shadows I seemed to recline
By the stream that first flowed at the stamp of Pegasus' hoof.
I felt I had all the powers for the mighty task
Of recounting the deeds of Alba's kings,
And had set my feeble lips to the potent spring
At which old Ennius quenched his thirst and sang
Of the Curian brothers fighting against the Horatii;
Of the royal trophies Aemilius' ship brought home:
Of all Fabius gained by delays; of the luckless battle
Of Cannae; and how, the Gods now hearing our prayers,
From their Roman home the Lares sent Hannibal flying;
And how the geese, by their warning cackles,
Saved the Roman citadel.

But Apollo, watching me from his Castalian grove
As he leant on his golden lyre by his grotto, cried:
'Fool, what have you to do with such a stream?
Who said that you should write epic poetry?
Not thence, Propertius, need you expect to win fame;
A soft sward is the proper track for a light-wheeled chariot.
Let your book be one that a girl who feels lonely, waiting
For her lover, may read or toss on the stool at her feet.
Keep, then, your pages within the prescribed gyrations,
Nor overload the ship of your talent.
If one oar's in the sea while the other scrapes the shore,
You will go in safety, but in mid-ocean
Is perilous turmoil.'

As he finished speaking he pointed with ivory plectrum
To a spot by a path new-made on the mossy ground.
Here was a verdurous grotto lined with mosaic
From whose hollow-worn roof hung tambourines,
And sacred things of the Muses, an image in clay
Of Father Silenus, the pipes of Arcadian Pan;
And my favourite birds, the doves of my Lady Venus,
Were dipping their beaks in the Hippocrene spring.
And here the nine Muses, each in her proper sphere,
Busied their tender hands as their talents prompted;
One gathered ivy to bind round the thyrsus; another
Arranged her songs for the lyre; a third
Wove garlands of roses.

Then one of the Goddesses laid a hand on my shoulder—
Calliope, from her appearance, I judged her to be :
'Content to be always drawn by snow-white swans,
No charger's neigh will lead you into battle ;
Not for you to sound the harsh trumpet's martial call,
Or invest the Muses' grove with war ;
Not for you to tell in what field of battle the standard
Of Marius stood when Rome broke the Teutons' power,
Nor how the wild Rhine, imbrued with Swabian blood,
Swept the mangled corpses along
In its sorrowing waves.

'Your theme shall be flower-wreathed lovers at someone's door,
And the signs they leave of their drunken flight through the night,
That whoever would cheat stern men of their wives shut up
May know through you how to cast the spell
That will charm them forth.'

Having finished speaking, Calliope drew a draught
From the spring and moistened my lips with the water
Philetas knew.

III.4 Woe to the Parthians!

Against wealthy India Caesar is planning war
And, godlike, to cleave with his fleet the pearl-rich sea.
What a prize for true men: earth's limits to yield a triumph!
Euphrates and Tigris to flow in subjection!
Under Italy's sceptre, though late, this province shall fall;
The Parthian spoil shall be no stranger
To Roman Jupiter.

Go, spread your sails, you prows, well-proved in battle;
And, horses of war, lead on as is ever your way.
I sing propitious omens. Now expiate
The blood of the Crassi; go, and serve well
Our City's history.

Now Mars, our Father, and holy Vesta's fire
That rules our fate, let me live to see the day
When Caesar's chariot passes, weighed down with booty,
And the horses repeatedly halt at the people's cheers.
Let me read, as I lay my head on my loved one's breast,
The titles of all the captured cities;
Let me see the elusive horsemen's arrows; the bows
Of the trousered soldiers; the captive chieftains,
With their weapons strung over them.

Keep safe your progeny, Venus,; preserve for ever
This stock of Aeneas you see still thriving here.
And let those whose labours have earned them take the spoils;
To add my cheers on the Sacred Way
Is enough for me.

III.5 Love first: then Philosophy

Love is a God of the peace we lovers revere;
Hard fights with my loved one are quite enough for me.
My spirit is not spurred on by hateful gold;
My thirst does not drink from jewelled goblets.

For me no thousand yokes plough rich Campania;
No precious bronzes accrue from the ruin
Of wretched Corinth.

Unlucky the primal clay in the fashioning hands
Of Prometheus: he did his work with too little care.
Arranging our bodies, he took no account of our minds,
Though his first concern should have been for the spirit.
As it is, far out at sea we are tossed about
By the winds; we go looking for enemies, heaping
War upon war.

You will take no riches with you to Acheron's waves;
Naked, poor fool, you'll embark in the ship of death.
Ghosts all mingled, victor and vanquished together,
Captive Jugurtha will sit beside Consul Marius,
Irus the beggar by Croesus the Lydian King.
Death comes best at its natural time
As the Fates intended.

My delight since earliest youth to have dwelt on Helicon,
Joining hands with the Muses in choral dance;
My delight to enchain my mind with deep Bacchic draughts,
My head ever wreathed with the roses of spring.
But when weight of years has interrupted my loving,
And hoary age has frosted my raven hair,
It shall be my pleasure to learn the ways of nature,
And which of the Gods is the Power that rules
This world, our home.

My joy then to learn how the moon comes up, then wanes,
Returning each month with horns conjoined in a circle;
How the winds are lords of the sea; what the East wind wants
With his squalls; whence the water that never fails the clouds;
If the world's strong fortress shall one day be overthrown;
Why the bow of bright colours imbibes the rain;
What caused the peaks of the Pindus to quake, or the sun
To put on mourning and drape his horses in black;
Why Boötes tardily turns his plough and oxen,
And with fires close-pressed the chorus of Pleiads gleams;
Why the deeps of the ocean never burst their bounds;
And why the full circuit of the year
Contains four seasons.

And I'll ask if the Gods rule underground, and the Giants
Are racked, and the head of Tisiphone seethes with snakes;
If Alcmaeon's Furies are there and Phineus' hunger,
Thirst in the midst of water, the wheel, and the rocks;
If triple-throated Cerberus guards Hell's cavern,
And for Tityus' bulk nine acres are all too few:
Or whether mere fanciful tales have been handed down
To us wretched men, and after the pyre
We have nothing to fear.

This, then, for me, is how life shall close; but you,
To whom arms are dearer, go and bring home
The standards of Crassus.

III.6 Good Hope of Accord

As you hope she will give you your freedom, tell me, Lygdamus:
What do you really think about my loved one?
You're not trying, are you, to trick me with empty joys,
Recounting what I would want to believe?
Every messenger ought to refrain from lies,
And a slave, with reason to fear, should be even truer.
So now begin, and tell me, right from the start,
All you remember. With ears intent
I'll drink it in.

So you saw her, did you, weeping, her hair dishevelled,
And her eyes suffused with copious tears?
Was no mirror visible, Lygdamus, on the coverlet?
Did the toilet case lie shut at the foot of the bed?
Did her sombre dress fall over her tender arms,
And no jewelled rings adorn her snow-white hands?
Was the house full of gloom and the maids all gloomy too,
As they worked at their spinning, herself in their midst?
And did she press her handkerchief to her eyes,
As with plaintive voice she gave you this answer
To my reproaches?—

'Is this the reward you heard him promise me, Lygdamus?
To break faith when a slave was the witness brings certain punishment.

Can he leave me in misery though there's nothing I've done,
And take home a woman I won't describe?
Is he glad that I lie alone in an empty bed?
If he wants, let him still revile me, Lygdamus,
After I'm dead!

'Not by her qualities—no, by her herbal brews
That wanton has won: it's her whirling magic wheel
That holds him spellbound, her horrible bloated toad,
The bones she's gathered of dried-up serpents,
Screech-owl feathers found among fallen tombs,
Stained linen head-bands snatched from pyres at funerals.
If my dreams don't lie, then, Lygdamus, at my feet
I vow they shall suffer punishment, late but ample.
Mouldering cobwebs shall hang round their idle bed,
And Venus herself on their nights together
Shall be fast asleep.'

If my loved one's lamentations spring from her heart,
Hurry then, Lygdamus—back by the way you came!
Take her from me this message full of tears:
That my love knows anger, never deceit,
And a fire torments me as fierce as the one she feels.
Why for two whole weeks I'll swear I've kept clear of women!
And if war so bitter ends in happy accord,
So far as it rests with me, then Lygdamus,
Freedom is yours.

III.7 Paetus Drowned

Through you, then, money, our lives are full of trouble;
For you we take untimely the road to death.
It is you that cruelly nourish the vices of men;
From you come all the seeds of care.
When Paetus was setting his sails for Pharos' port,
You plunged him time and again in the raging sea;
For in quest of you he was sadly bereft of youth,
To drift, strange food for far-distant fishes.
Nor could his mother pay him the proper tribute
Of a loving burial, laying his ashes
With those of his kinsmen.

Yes, Paetus, the sea-birds now hover over your bones;
You have now for your tomb the whole Carpathian sea.
Ill-omened North Wind, you, the dreaded abductor
Of Orithyia, what spoils will you win from him?
And Neptune, why such joy at the wreck of a ship—
And one that carried virtuous men?
Paetus, why count your few years? And why, as you swim,
Invoke your dear mother? The waves lack Gods to hear.
Your mooring chains that were all made fast to the rock
Gave way when the cables frayed and snapped
In the squalls of the night.

Give back his corpse to the earth; the deep has his life;
Of your own accord, mean sands, cover Paetus over.
And may the sailors, passing his sepulchre by,
Tell how his fate can fill with terror
The boldest of men.

Go then; build ships; make instruments of death;
A death like this one is wrought by the hands of men.
Fate's scope was too narrow on land so we added the waves;
Our contrivings have widened fortune's unhappy ways.
Would an anchor hold you when home had no such power?
What fate has he earned whose native land's too small?
The winds take all you gain; not a single keel
Has ever grown old; the very port breaks faith.
Insidious nature smooths the sea for the greedy;
Hardly once can you meet with success.

When the ships that returned in triumph from Troy were wrecked
Off Euboea, then Greece was engulfed in the vast salt sea;
And Ulysses wept that his comrades, one by one,
Should be lost to him: only against the sea
Was his cunning powerless.

But had Paetus been content to plough his fields
With his father's oxen, allowing weight to my words,
Then beside his own hearth he'd be living, a boon companion,
Not rich, but on land, and regretting only
The wealth he had missed.

He was not one to endure the shriek of the gale,
Or by hauling rough ropes to chafe his delicate hands;
But rather to lie on a beautifully panelled bed,
Propping his head upon shot-silk pillows.
Yet him, poor wretch, the pitiless night saw clinging
To a plank and gulping down the hateful brine;
From his living hands the waves wrenched the nails away:
Many evils conspired together
To compass his end.

Yet, weeping, he uttered these plaintive last requests,
Before the dark surge should stop his dying mouth:
'You winds that, godlike, rule the Aegean Sea,
And all you waves that weigh down my head,
Why are you snatching away the luckless years
Of my youth's first bloom? To your sea I brought guiltless hands.
Alas! on the gull-haunted rocks I shall now be dashed;
The blue sea's God has poised his trident.
But at least let my body be cast on some shore of Italy;
Whatever remains will suffice if it reaches my mother.'
As he spoke, the whirling eddy dragged him under;
And for Paetus these were his final words—
And his final day.

You hundred daughters of Nereus, nymphs of the sea,
And Thetis, wrung by your grief for your own dead son,
Why did no hand support his weary chin?
Do not pretend you could ever have found him
A heavy burden.

But the savage North Wind never shall see my sails:
At my loved one's door I will lay myself down,
And shun adventures.

III.8A Lovers' Quarrels

What a joyous brawl we had last night in the lamplight,
And what revilings from that mad tongue of yours,
When, enraged with wine, you pushed the table away
And with furious hand hurled wine-cups at me!
Come, then: boldly launch an attack on my hair;
Leave on my face the marks of your pretty nails;
Threaten me, thrusting a firebrand in my face,
That you'll burn out my eyes; then tear my clothes
And lay bare my chest.

Assuredly you show the signs of a genuine passion;
No woman not deeply in love is afflicted so.
She whose rabid tongue goes hurling insults
Lies prone at the feet of mighty Venus.
She surrounds herself, perhaps, with throngs of guards,
Or dashes along the street like a stricken Maenad;
Mad dreams keep filling her timid mind with terror,
Or a painted girl in a picture moves her to tears:
Of all such torments of mind I can tell the meaning;
I have learnt they are signs of certain love.
No plighted love is certain that never resorts
To quarrels. And so let placid girls fall
To the lot of my enemies.

May my comrades see the marks of bites on my neck;
May bruises proclaim that my sweetheart's been in my company.
In love I would either be full of grief myself
Or hear you grieve, see either your tears or mine—
As when by your scowls you throw at me words unspoken,
Or your gesturing fingers convey what should stay unsaid.
I have no use for sleep sighs never trouble;
I could wish that my sweetheart would rage forever
And I be pale.

Sweeter was Paris's ardour when, straight from battle
With the Greeks, he could bring his Helen the joys of love.
While tameless Hector held back the conquering Greeks,
Paris waged mightier wars in Helen's arms.
So, either against you, or for you against my rivals,
There will always be battle; where you are concerned
I want no peace.

III.8B Beauty and the Serpent

Be glad, my dear, there is none so lovely as you.
If there were it would grieve you; but as things are
You've the right to be proud.

But as for you, who laid a trap for our love—
May your parents-in-law be with you and plague you forever!
If ever you had the chance of a stolen night,
It was due to her being offended with me,
Not to love for you.

III.9 Modest Ambitions

Maecenas, Knight of the blood of Tuscan kings—
You who do not aspire to a loftier rank—
Why launch me on so vast a poetic ocean?
Such spread of sail does not suit my ship.
It's a shameful thing to take on your head a weight
You cannot sustain; then, overborne,
Sink down on your knees.

All things do not equally suit all men;
From different heights may different palms be won.
Statues that seem to breathe are Lysippus' glory,
While Calamis boasts of his perfect horses;
Apelles claims the prize for his pictures of Venus,
Parrhasius an honoured place for his miniature art;
On shapely metal Mentor chases scenes,
And Mys's acanthus winds its narrow way;
Phidias' Jove arrays himself in ivory,
But Attic marble sets off Praxiteles.
For some the palm of Olympic chariots waits;
Others are born for speed of foot.
One man is made for peace, another to bear
The arms of the camp; each grows in accordance
With the seeds of his nature.

But your own life's teachings, Maecenas, are what I have
followed;
I must cite your own example to win the day.
You could wield, if you liked, the axes, the badge of high office,
Or, taking your seat in the Forum, dispense just laws;
You could make your way through the spears of the warlike Medes,
And cram your house with trophies of war.
And yet, though Caesar affords you the means of success,
And at all times ready wealth pours into your hands,
You forbear and into the shadows humbly retire;
Of your own accord you reef your bellying sails.
This choice must make you as great as renowned Camillus;
Your name will be heard on men's lips like his.
You will hold your way united in fame with Caesar,
Your loyalty, Maecenas, the true insignia
That mark your triumph.

I cleave no swelling sea with sail-borne keel;
Under a rivulet's bank I take my leisure.
I'll not lament the burning of Cadmus' city,
Or the seven contests all ending in woe;
Nor tell of the Trojan gates or Apollo's citadel
Or the ships that, after ten springs, carried home the Greeks,
When they'd ploughed up the site of Neptune's walls, thrown down
By the conquering wooden horse contrived by Pallas.
Enough to have given pleasure along with Callimachus,
To have sung in the strain of Philetas of Cos.
May my poems set boys on fire and girls no less,
And let them all acclaim me divine
And offer me worship!

If you were to show me the way, I would hymn Jove's battle
On Phlegra's hills with the Giants who threatened heaven;
I would tell of twin kings brought up at the wild beast's udder,
Of the city walls that Remus' death made strong,
And the lofty Palatine grazed by Roman steers:
My powers will rise to your high commands.
Let my theme be the chariots, victors from East and West,
The Parthians' bows, undrawn in pretended flights,
Pelusium's stronghold toppled by Roman steel,
And the death-heavy hands of Antony, armed
For his own destruction.

Take the reins, meanwhile; grant kindly aid to my youth
On its chosen course; cheer on my speeding wheels.
This measure of praise, Maecenas, you allow me;
And to you it is due that men will say
Where you led I followed.

III.10 Cynthia's Birthday

Why should the Muses, I wondered, pay me this visit
So early, and stand by my bed in the sunlight's flush.
They made me a sign: today was my loved one's birthday;
And now three times they clapped their hands
To wish her well.

May today be without a cloud; may the winds stand still;
And softly the menacing waves subside on the shore.
Today let me see no mourners; let Niobe even,
Who's turned to stone, suppress her tears;
Let the sea-birds rest their throats and hush their wailing,
And the nightingale cease to chide for Itys
And the fatal banquet.

Arise, my dearest, born under happy omens,
And pray to the Gods, who demand their due.
And now with purest water dissipate sleep,
And let your deft fingers arrange your lustrous hair.
Then put on your dress—the one you wore when first
You ensnared my eyes, nor forget the flowers for your head.
And pray that your beauty, the source of all your power,
May last through the years, and that over me
You may reign forever.

And now that the incense burns on the flower-wreathed altars,
And all through the house the flames of good omen shine,
Give thought to the festive board, that amid the wine-cups
The night may speed on, while the onyx caskets
Spread the scent of saffron.

To this night of dancing let the shrill flute succumb,
As your wanton talk flows unrestrained;
Let convivial pleasures dispel unwelcome sleep
And their sounds re-echo along the street outside.
And now cast lots that the fall of the dice may tell
Whom Cupid strikes, with those arrows of his,
The heavier blows.

When, with ample draughts, the hours are spent, and Venus
Ordains the attendant mysteries of the night,
Let us then in our room together solemnize
The rites of the year, and so fulfil
Your birthday's round.

III. I I Woman the Formidable

Why marvel to see that a woman rules my life
And drags me off to obey her as her slave?
Why trump up against me the shameful charge of cowardice
For not breaking my yoke and bursting my chains?
The sailor best knows when death is on its way;
His wounds have taught the soldier to be afraid.
In the youth I have left behind I used to utter
Boasts like yours: from my example
Now learn to fear.

Medea drove fiery bulls in a yoke of iron;
Sowed seeds of battle from which sprang men-at-arms;
Shut the fierce gaping jaws of the guardian serpent—
All that the golden fleece might reach Aeson's halls.
Penthesilea once dared, as she rode her horse,
To attack the Danaän ships with her arrows;
And when from her forehead her golden helmet was lifted,
Achilles, her vanquisher, was vanquished
By her gleaming beauty.

And Omphale, too, the Lydian girl who'd bathed
In Gyges' lake, attained such fame for her beauty
That he whose pillars enclosed the world he'd tamed
Plucked the soft wool with his hardened hands.
And Semiramis founded Babylon, city of Persia;
It rose up, a massive pile, with walls of brick
So wide that two chariots, meeting from opposite sides,
Might avoid a graze from touching axles.
And she led the Euphrates through the midst of her citadel,
And commanded Bactra to lower its head
And submit to her rule.

Why arraign for their sins, then, heroes, or why the Gods?
Why Jupiter for shaming himself and his house?
Why mention her who lately heaped taunts on our arms,
Even among her slaves a strumpet,
And who, as the price of that infamous union, claimed
The walls of Rome and the Senate all in her power?
O Alexandria, vicious and full of deceit!
O Memphis, stained with the blood of our many hurts,
Whose sands divested Pompey of all his triumphs!
Never can Rome erase that brand.

Better for Pompey if on the Phlegrean Plain
He had died, or if to his father-in-law
He had bowed his neck.

And, indeed, the harlot queen of debauched Canopus—
The signal mark of shame on Philip's house—
Dared to oppose to our Jove the bark of Anubis,
And to make the Tiber suffer the threats of the Nile,
Thinking with rattling sistrum to rout our trumpets,
To beat our floating rams with her pole-driven barges,
And on the Tarpeian Rock, amid arms and statues
Of Marius, under her womanish canopy
To sit in judgment.

Would it help us now to have broken the power of Tarquin,
Stigmatized for his mode of life as 'the Proud',
If we had to endure a woman? Sing, Rome, as the triumph
Goes by; now safe, for Augustus pray length of days.
She fled to the winding streams of trembling Nile;
To Roman chains she surrendered her hands.
See! pictured there, by the sacred asp's bite;
Sleep steals over her limbs; they drink it in.
'Rome, with such a protector, you had no need
To fear me': these were the final words
Of that wine-dulled tongue.

Did the City, high on her seven hills, the Queen
Of the world, then quake at a woman's threat of war,
Forgetful of Scipio's fleet, of Camillus' standards,
Of the Bosphorus lately subdued by Pompey's hand?
Of spoils won from Hannibal, trophies of conquered Syphax,
Of the glory of Pyrrhus shattered and prostrate
Before our feet?

The Gods established these walls and they will protect them;
Scarcely should Rome fear Jove while Caesar lives.
The fissure Curtius closed is his monument;
Decius, spurring his horse, broke the battle front;
Horatius' path still speaks of the riven bridge;
And there's one whose name of Raven preserves his fame.
Apollo will tell how the line was turned at Actium;
One day of war carried off so vast an array.
But you, O mariner, whether you're making for port
Or leaving, throughout the Ionian Sea
Remember Caesar!

III.12 Wifely Loyalty

How could you, Postumus, leave your Galla in tears
And follow the Emperor's valiant standards to war?
What price the glory of Parthia despoiled
Against Galla's many prayers that you should not go?
I could wish to see all you hunters of booty perish,
And especially the man to whom arms mean more
Than a faithful wife.

Yes, madman, wrapped in your cloak you will drink from your
helmet

In weariness the River Araxes' water.
And meanwhile she'll pine away as each empty tale
Fills her with dread that your valour may turn to bitterness;
That some Median arrow rejoices at your death
Or mail-clad horseman on gilded charger;
That an urn will bring back some relic to set her weeping,
For thus the men who fall in those lands
Return to their homes.

You are overblest with pure-hearted Galla, Postumus;
The way you've behaved, you were worthy of no such wife.
What will a girl with none to protect her do
In this Rome of ours, preceptress of luxury?
But you need not worry: no presents will conquer Galla;
She will not harbour thoughts of your heartlessness.
On whatever day the Fates shall return you safe,
There your chaste Galla will be, to throw
Her arms round your neck.

Postumus, through his wondrous wife will be
A second Ulysses. Him those long delays
Never harmed—the ten years' war, the many adventures:
Ismara, Calpe, the Cyclops' fire-dimmed eye;
Circe's wiles; the tenacious lotos; Scylla,
And Charybdis rent by the water's ebb and flow;
The oxen Apollo's daughter once had pastured
Whose flesh on the sailors' spits still bellowed;
Aeaea's weeping queen from whose bed he fled,
To swim many nights and days in the winter's sea,
To enter the dark domain of silent spirits,
And stop his oarsmen's ears by the Sirens' pools;

And at last to revive his ancient bow with the blood
Of the suitors, and so to end his peregrinations.
And not in vain, for at home his wife had stayed true;
And Aelia Galla shall now surpass
Penelope's loyalty.

III.13 Gold, the Bane of Rome

You ask why are nights with grasping girls so costly,
Why our pockets, emptied by lust, protest their loss.
Clear and certain the cause of such widespread ruin:
Luxury's road has become too easy.
The Indian ant brings up from her hollowed mine
Gold for our use; the Red Sea sends us pearls;
Cadmus's Tyre supplies us with purple dye,
The Arab shepherd with cinnamon, richly scented.
These arms storm even the strongholds of the pure,
Even the pride of a haughty Penelopë.
Matrons step forth arrayed in the wealth of prodigals,
Flaunting the spoils of dishonour before our eyes:
No shame in demanding; no shame about giving themselves;
Or if there is, they cease to demur
When they're paid their price.

Husbands in Eastern lands, whom the horses of dawn
Encrimson, are blest by a law that stands alone.
For, the final torch now cast on the dead man's bier,
The pious wives crowd round, their hair dishevelled,
Contending for death, for the right to follow their husband,
Disgraced if they are not given leave to die.
The victors burn, opposing their breasts to the flames,
And pressing their own charred lips on his.
But in Rome all brides are faithless; no girl here
Is true as Evadnë or, like Penelope,
Loyal to the end.

Happy young men of the peaceful countryside
Whose wealth was in their crops and in their fruit-trees!
Their gifts were quinces shaken down from the bough,
And punnets filled with purple berries.
Their hands now gathered violets; now they brought back
Tangles of lilies that gleamed through the wicker baskets,

Or bunches of grapes bedecked with their leaves, or a bird,
Its feathers all shot with rainbow colours.
And the kisses blandishments such as these had bought
The girls would give, in secluded dingles,
To their sylvan wooers.

A roe-deer's pelt was cover enough for two lovers,
And the grass grew tall to afford a natural bed.
The pine leant down and threw round them its lingering shade:
Who saw a naked Goddess feared no penalty.
The ram, horned lord of the sheep, when they'd cropped their fill,
Of his own accord led them back to the empty fold.
And the Gods and Goddesses, guardians of the fields,
Inscribed at men's hearths their words of kindness.
Thus Pan: 'Whoever you are who visit my paths,
Be free to hunt hares, or birds if they're what you seek.
Whether with lime-rod or hound you pursue your prize,
Just call my name from a crag and I'll be
Your ready companion.'

But now the shrines are idle, the groves deserted;
True religion is vanquished; all worship gold.
For gold good faith is banished and justice sold;
To gold the law now truckles, and conscience
That owns no law.

Doors, lightning-blasted, attest how impious Brennus
Assailed long-haired Apollo's Pythian realm;
And then from the laurelled summit Parnassus scattered
Direful snows on the arms of Gaul.
False Polymestor, for gold, took Polydore
Into his treacherous home. That gold might gleam
On Eriphyle's arms, the chasm swallowed
Amphiaraüs' horses, and he
Was seen no more.

I will speak—may my country find me a truthful prophet:
Proud Rome is falling, crushed by her own prosperity.
My words are certain but win no more belief
Than Cassandra's once did for Troy's disasters.
Alone she foretold that Paris brought death to her land,
That the Horse crept in like a treacherous serpent.
Well could her frenzy have served her father and people:
Though her tongue had spoken in vain, the Gods
Had told her the truth.

III.14 Spartan Ways are Best

Splendid indeed are Sparta's rules of sports
And especially all the blessings of games for women.
For there a girl is not blamed if she strips and takes
Her place with the men in athletic contests,
When from hand to hand flies the ball to baffle the eye,
Or the hooked rod clanks against the rolling hoop.
Besmirched with dust she stands to her marks on the track,
Or endures the bruises received in the wrestling.
Now on jubilant hands she binds the gloves for boxing,
Now for the throw whirls round in a circle
The weight of the discus.

She follows her father's hounds, hair rime-besprinkled,
Along the whole length of Mount Taygetus' ridges;
She thuds round the ring on her horse; to her snow-white side
She fastens a sword, bronze helmet on girlish head,
As the bare-bosomed Amazons do, a martial throng,
Who bathe themselves in Thermodon's waters,
Or Castor and Pollux upon Eurotas' banks—
One with his fists to be victor, the other with horses;
While Helen, they tell, breasts bared, would arm herself,
Not blushing that thus she stood before
The twin Gods, her brothers.

So lovers, by Spartan law, must not go apart;
Each may walk in the street by his sweetheart's side.
None fears for a girl's good name; none keeps her guarded;
None needs to dread a stern husband's grievous vengeance.
Without any envoy, tell your own story yourself;
You'll not be put off by long delays.
No purple hangings beguile your straying eyes;
No tiresome wait while a girl arranges
Her perfumed hair.

But the Roman woman goes compassed about by a throng,
The interspaces too small to admit a finger.
How to present yourself, how to couch your petition,
You cannot tell: obscure is the road love ponders.
But had Rome copied the rules of the Spartan contests,
Then she'd through their good effects now
Be to me the dearer.

III.15 Keep your Jealousy in Check

As I tell you the truth, now let there be no more storms
In our love; no sleepless nights to be spent without you:
When the constraints that go with boyhood's garb
Were lifted, and freedom was granted to learn love's road,
Lycinna it was—and no gifts of mine beguiled her—
Shared my first nights and instructed my ignorance.
Now nearly three years have gone by yet I hardly recall
That a dozen words have passed between us.
This love for you buries all nor, since I knew you,
Has any woman thrown sweet chains
Around my neck.

Remember Dirce, enraged when told that Antiope
Had formerly lain with Lycus, now Dirce's husband:
Often she tore Antiope's beautiful tresses
And clawed her soft cheeks with relentless hands;
Often burdened the girl, her slave, with outrageous tasks,
And told her to use the hard ground for pillow.
She provided for lodging a squalid hovel's darkness,
And denied her, thirsting, even the use
Of the common water.

Jove, do you render Antiope no help
As she suffers such ills? The harsh fetters gall her hands:
What shame to a God—a girl he once loved a slave!
On whom but Jove should chained Antiope call?
Yet unaided, exerting all the strength in her body,
She burst with both hands the tyrant's shackles.
Then on tremulous foot to Cithaeron's heights she ran;
Night came, and her sorry bed was sprinkled with frost.
Then wandering, often she started, hearing the sound
Of Asopus' flow, and supposing the feet
Of her mistress followed.

Her tears left Zethus unmoved, though Amphion pitied;
From their farmstead they turned her, their own true mother,
away.

Then, like the waves when they cease to heave and swell
As the East wind no longer contends with the wind from the South
And, the rasp of the shingle fading, the shore grows quiet,
So her knees gave way and down she fell.

Then their filial love, though tardy, awoke; they knew
Their mistake; their old guardian, worthy to serve Jove's sons,
Gave them their mother back. Then Dirce they bound
To a fierce wild bull to be dragged behind him.
Antiope, know Jove's hand: now over Dirce
You glory, who hither and thither is dragged to her death.
Blood reddens the fields of Zethus, and on the crags
Of Aracanthus Amphion sang
The Paean of victory.

Now harass Lycinna no more; she has not deserved it:
A woman's tearing rage never calls a halt.
Let your ears be stirred by no tales of her and me:
May I love you only, even after
Death's pyre consumes me.

III. 16 A Midnight Summons

It is midnight; and now from my loved one comes a letter;
It bids me be with her—and that without delay—
At Tibur where the gleaming peaks lift up
Twin turrets and Anio's waters drop
To wide pools below.

What now? Shall I trust my life to the veil of darkness,
Dreading the brigand hands so bold to seize?
But if through fear I defer my compliance, her tears
Will be fiercer than any nocturnal enemy.
Why, for one offence she shut me out a whole year;
Truly this girl in her dealings with me
Has ungentle hands.

Yet none would hurt a lover, dear to the Gods;
For him the road would be safe though Sciron beset it.
Whoever loves may walk wild Scythian shores;
He will meet with none so barbarous as to harm him.
The moon is his guide; the stars point out the hazards;
Love leads the way himself with brandished torch.
Even savage watchdogs avert their gaping jaws:
Yes, always the way is safe for the race of lovers.
Who so lacks shame he'd be splashed by the meagre blood
Of a lover—one to whom Venus herself
Was a ready companion?

But even were death the certain end of my dangers,
I ought still to accept it and even pay a price.
My loved one will bring me spices and honour my tombstone
With garlands of flowers; and there, by my grave,
She will sit and keep watch.

May she not, I pray, lay my bones in some busy place
Where the unremitting tread of the crowd goes by.
Such traffic brings dishonour to lovers' graves.
Let me rather lie in some sequestered spot
Shaded by trees or encompassed by nameless sand-dunes.
I should hate to think my name was recorded
Near the press of the highway.

III.17 To Bacchus, to free Him from Love's Tyranny

Now here at your altar, Bacchus, I bow down low.
Prosper, O Father, my sails; let me be at peace.
You have power, though Venus rages, to quell her squalls;
That wine of yours is trouble's remedy.
Through you are lovers joined, through you unloosed:
Wash my infirmity, Bacchus, out of my heart.
You too are no stranger to love; among the stars
Ariadne proclaims it, borne by your lynxes to heaven.
This sickness that stokes the inveterate fire in my bones
Only death or your wine will cure.
A sober night for lovers lying alone
Is always a torture, their minds distracted
By hope and fear.

But if, as your gifts take hold of my fervid brain,
They summon slumber, Bacchus, to still my bones,
Why then I'll plant vines, I'll set them in rows on the hills,
And myself keep watch that no beasts may crop them.
While my vats do not fail to foam with purple must,
Or the fresh-plucked grapes to stain the feet of the treaders,
I shall live through you and your horns of strength, O Bacchus,
All the rest of my life, and be known as the poet
Who sings of your power.

I shall tell of your birth through the lightning from Etna's forge,
Of the Bacchic dancers routing Indian arms;
Of Lycurgus raving in vain at the novel vine,
And of Pentheus torn apart by three Maenad bands;
Then of how the Tuscan sailors in dolphin form
Leapt in the sea from their vine-wreathed ship,
And of how through the midst of Naxos, at your behest,
Flowed the fragrant streams of wine whence all
Might drink their fill.

Loose clusters of ivy shall circle your gleaming neck,
While a Lydian coif confines your hallowed hair;
With sweet olive oil your youthful throat shall glisten,
And your flowing robe shall brush your naked feet.

Theban Bacchants shall beat the soft-sounding timbrels,
And fauns, goat-footed, blow their pipes ;
And the mighty Goddess, close by, the tower-crowned Cybele,
Shall make the loud cymbals clash for the Phrygian dance,
While before the temple gates stands the bowl of wine
Whence the priest, for your worship, shall pour a libation
From his golden ladle.

These things must be sung in a far from humble strain
With a voice that breathes Pindaric thunder.
All that I ask is for you to set me free
From love's arrogant rule, with sleep subduing
My anguished spirit.

III.18 Lament for Marcellus

It was here where the sea, shut out from shady Avernus,
Plays around Baiae's warm and steamy pools,
And Misenus, trumpeter of Troy, in his sandy grave
Can hear the rumble of Hercules' causeway;
Yes, here where the cymbals clashed for the Theban God
Visiting in bountiful mood the cities of men
(But Baiae, hateful now for your heinous crime,
What malevolent God invests your waters?)—
Here then, overwhelmed, he plunged his face
In the Stygian waves, and here on your lake
His spirit wanders.

What use his birth, his merit, the best of mothers,
Or that Caesar's hearth had become his own?
What use the billowing awnings, the theatre thronged
In his honour, and all that his mother's hands achieved?
He is dead, his twentieth year unhappily halted:
So much good his days enclosed
In so small a compass!

Go, then, inflate your pride; imagine triumphs;
Exult that whole theatres stand in your praise; surpass
The splendour of cloth of gold; and make the Great Games
One sparkle of jewels: all this you will yield
To the funeral fire.

To this must come everyone, high and low alike;
An evil road, indeed, yet all must tread it.
All must placate the Dog that barks with three throats,
And board the boat the grim old ferryman plies.
The man of caution may wall himself in with bronze
Or iron, but death will drag him forth.
Strength did not save Achilles, nor beauty Nireus;
And to Croesus the wealth of Pactolus' waters
Brought no exemption.

Now, boatman, to you, who ferry the sacred shades
Of men, let them bring a body bereft of spirit.
From mortality's paths, like Caesar before him and Claudius,
Sicily's victor, already he's taken
His way to the stars.

III.19 Female Concupiscence

You keep throwing men's lust in my face but, mark my words,
You women are much more under its domination.

When you've snapped the reins of the modesty you despise,
Rapt in spirit you stop at nothing.

The flame that runs through a field of ignited corn
Would sooner expire, or rivers return to their source,
The Syrtes furnish calm harbourage, wild Melea
Welcome the sailor to shores of good hope,
Than a way could ever be found to make you women
Halt in your tracks or break the goad
Of your headlong iniquity.

Let her be my witness who suffered the scorn of the bull
Of Crete and assumed the false horns of a wooden cow;
And Tyro, on fire for Enipeus, Thessalian God
Of the river, and ready to yield in total surrender;
And Myrrha—a name of shame—whose burning desire
For her father transformed her and hid her limbs
In a myrrh-tree's branches.

No need to speak of Medea when she, a mother,
By her children's slaughter appeased her passion's rage;
Or of Clytemnestra who by her adultery shamed
The whole Pelopian house at Mycenae;
Or Scylla who sold herself to the handsome Minos,
And by cutting her father's purple lock cut off
His kingdom too: this dower she'd promised his enemy,
And perfidious love thus opened her father's gates.
Yet Minos is worthy to sit as a Judge of the Dead;
Though the victor, justice was done to his enemy
(May you single girls light happier wedding torches!):
Scylla, borne on his Cretan ship,
Hung high from the mast.

III.20A An Invitation

Do you really believe that the man you saw setting sail
Away from your arms now even recalls how you looked?
Hard was he who for gain could leave his sweetheart!
Was the whole of Africa worth so much
That you should weep?

You fool yourself dreaming of Gods and empty vows;
Another love, I dare say, now wrings his heart.
But you have beauty's power; the arts of Pallas;
The illustrious fame of ancestral learning:
A house well blest if you had a faithful lover.
I will be faithful: dearest, run
Into my arms!

III.20B Marriage Vows

It comes—the first night of my love; the date is fixed.
Linger long then, moon, for our first embraces;
And you as well, Apollo, too prone to protract
The fires of summer, cut short the course
Of your lingering light.

Many an hour must be given up to discussion
Before we are summoned by Venus to love's sweet strife:
Terms must first be proposed and articles settled
For this my new love, and the contract written.
Cupid himself with his seal will confirm our pledges,
Our witness the starry Goddess's twisted crown.
For when love's bed is bound by no certain compact,
No Gods take vengeance for nights of restless watching,
And the fetters desire made fast it soon unlocks.
For us may the first good omens keep
Our faith intact.

Who violates, then, the altars at which his vows
Were sanctified and pollutes the marriage rites
In another bed, let all love's woes befall him;
Let him be a target for shrill-voiced gossip;
And however he weeps, may his loved one never open
Her window at night; may he love without respite,
Never plucking the fruit!

III.21 Athens, Refuge from Love

I must take the long journey to Athens, city of learning:
May the length of the way set me free from love's oppression.
My passion grows when I constantly gaze at my loved one;
It is love itself that nourishes love.

I have left no way untried that might repel it,
But Cupid himself assails me on every side.
Seldom indeed she admits me, often refusing,
Or sleeping clothed, the bed's width between.
The only help is to leave for another country:
As far from my eyes as Cynthia goes
Love will go from my heart.

Come, now, comrades, push the ship out to sea;
Draw lots for your stations, a pair of men to each oar.
To the masthead hoist propitious sails. The breeze
Blows fair for sailors and bodes clear weather.
Good-bye to the towers of Rome and to you, my friends;
And, my loved one, whatever you've been to me,
Good-bye to you!

I'm away, the Adriatic's novel guest,
And must offer a prayer to the Gods of the sounding waves:
When the ship has crossed the Ionian Sea and rests
Her weary sails in Lachaeum's tranquil waters,
For the rest of the way, where the Isthmus holds back the sea
On either side, my feet must take over the task.
And when the shore by Piraeus' harbour receives me,
I shall climb the long stretch of road that leads
To the Athens of Theseus.

In Plato's Academy there I shall start to purge
My mind, or in learned Epicurus' gardens;
Or study the art of language, Demosthenes' weapon,
Or the salt in witty Menander's plays.
And painted pictures are sure to capture my eyes
Or figures an artist's hand has wrought
In bronze or ivory.

The space of years or the wastes of sundering sea
Will assuage the wounds I hide away in my heart;
Or, subdued by fate but not by a shameful love,
I shall die, and then the day of my death
Will bring no dishonour.

III.22 Rome, Fairest of Homes

You've been happy, then, at cool Cyzicus all these years,
Where the isthmus, my Tullus, is washed by Propontic waves,
Where Cybele, carved from a sacred vine-stock, stands,
And Dis, the abductor, drove his horses?
Whatever your joy in the cities that lie by the Hellespont,
Yet let your heart, my Tullus, be moved
By my longing for you.

Contemplate Atlas sustaining the skies, if you like,
Or the head of Medusa, severed by Perseus' hand,
Or the cowshed of Geryon, Hercules' marks in the sand
When he wrestled Antaeus, the floor the Hesperides danced on;
Let your oarsmen thrust back the waters of Colchian Phasis,
And follow the route of the Argo that, hewn on Mount Pelion
To the novel shape of a ship, sailed, fresh to the sea,
Between the rocks with a dove for guide;
Or visit Ortygia or the Caÿstrus' banks,
Or the River Nile dividing its waters
Into seven channels.

Yet to the land of Rome all marvels yield;
Here nature has furnished whatever the world finds good.
Our land is more prone to bear arms than to cause any hurt:
Fame is not shamed by our Roman story.
For our power is based less on steel than on duty done
To Gods and men, and our wrath restrains
Its hand in victory.

Here Anio flows, and Clitumnus from Umbria's pathways,
And the Marcian aqueduct, built to last for ever;
Here Alba's lake and Nemi's, of common source,
And the spring that refreshed the horse of Pollux.
But no horned vipers glide on their scaly bellies,
Our streams are not so mad as to spawn weird monsters,
Andromeda's chains do not clank for her mother's sin,
Nor the sun in dread shun Thracian banquets;
No fire that burns at a distance threatens a life,
Whereby a mother might bring destruction
On the head of her son.

No Maenads here hunt Pentheus from his tree;
No sacrificial doe frees Danaän ships;
Juno disfigures no rival's head with horns,
Turning her into a horrid cow;
And Sinis, haunter of crags, to torture and kill
Poor Greeks, bends down no trees, that bent
At last for him.

This land is your parent, Tullus, your fairest home;
Here you should strive for honour to match your lineage;
Here are citizens fit for your eloquence; here
Good hope of descendants born of a marriage
With a wife who loves you.

III.23 The Lost Writing Tablets

They are lost to me, then—my tablets that knew so much,
And lost along with them all those charming messages!
So worn they were by my hands' continual rubbing,
They proclaimed themselves mine though my seal was lacking.
They knew, in my absence, how to appease a girl,
And how to speak the proper words of persuasion.
They had no golden mounts to make them precious;
Just a common boxwood frame for their dingy wax.
Yet, however poor, they always faithfully served me,
And never failed to win the success
Their efforts merited.

Or this, it may be, was what they were charged to say:
'I'm fuming: last night, you dawdler, how late you were!
Can it be there's some other girl you now think prettier?
Or a lying tale you repeat about me?'
Or perhaps: 'You must come today; we will while away
The time together; love's welcome will last all night'—
Such things as a clever girl's glib tongue invents
When, ready for love, she appoints the hour
With artful blandishments.

Suppose some grasping merchant now writes his accounts
On my tablets and mixes them up with his odious ledgers!
If anyone brings them back I'll reward him with gold:
Who'd stick to mere wood when he might have riches?
Go, boy, then: quickly post this notice of mine
On some pillar, and add that your master lives
On the Esquiline Hill.

III.24 Recovery from Lovesickness

False is that trust of yours in your beauty, woman,
Whom my favouring eyes have long made overproud.
Yes, Cynthia, greatly indeed my love has praised you;
It shames me now that through my verses
You gained such fame.

I praised you in all the guises your beauty wore;
My love supposed you to be what you never were.
To the rose of dawn I often compared your colour,
Although your complexion's radiance owed
Small debt to nature.

This folly that my father's friends could not avert,
Nor Thessalian witch wash away with the whole wide sea,
I am rid of, unhelped by the surgeon's knife or the cautery,
Although adrift—I confess the truth—
On a vast dark ocean.

A captive I was, fast bound, hands tied behind back,
Scorched in the fire of Venus's brazen furnace.
But see! the flower-wreathed prow has touched the quayside;
The perilous shoals are passed; the anchor
Has now been cast!

Wearied by the mighty surge, at last I'm sane!
My wounds have closed, and now they are healed.
At the shrine of the Goddess of Sanity—if she exists—
I devote myself: for Jove was deaf
And ignored my prayers.

III.25 Maledictions on Parting

A laughing stock—that's what I was—among the guests
When the tables were set, a butt for the meanest chatterer.
Five years I've been able to render you faithful service;
Now you will often bite your nails
And bemoan my fidelity.

I'm not moved by your tears; it was by that art you caught me;
Always, Cynthia, you weep in order to trick.
I must weep as I leave, but my wrongs subdue my weeping.
This yoke might have fitted us well if only
You had let it go forward.

Now I say good-bye to the threshold that weeps at my words,
To the door my angry hand has never broken.
And you, though you hide the years, may their weight oppress
you,
And the wrinkles come that bode your beauty ill!
And every grey hair may you want to pluck out by the roots,
As your mirror throws the wrinkles back in your face!
Shut out, may you in turn suffer cruel disdain,
And as you grow old feel the very wrongs
You once inflicted!

My song has pronounced against you its maledictions
Charged with doom: now learn to dread
Your beauty's end!

Book IV

IV.1 The Poet and the Seer: a Colloquy

A. The Poet speaks: He will write of Old Rome

All this that you see here, stranger, this mighty Rome,
Was just grassy hills before Trojan Aeneas came.
Where the Palatine, sacred to ship-ruling Phoebus, stands
Evander's cattle found a refuge.
That temple of gold is for Gods that were once of clay;
In those old days an artless hut was no shame.
From a naked crag Tarpeian Jove then thundered.
To our oxen the waters of Tiber still seemed strange.
Where Remus's shrine stands up at the top of those steps
Was the hearth the brothers then deemed a kingdom.
No towering Senate-house gleaming with purple-hemmed robes
Held the rustic Fathers clad in skins.
A trumpet would summon the citizens to debate;
In a field a hundred would then assemble,
And there was the Senate.

No awning billowed above the cavernous theatre;
The stage, unlike today's, exhaled no saffron;
And no one went seeking exotic Gods, for all
Hung awe-struck over ancestral rituals.
With bonfires of hay the Pales' yearly festival
Was kept, as now with the sacrificial horse.
Vesta, then poor, rejoiced in her flower-wreathed donkeys;
Her emblems, modest but holy, lean oxen drew.
A fat pig's blood then purged the narrow crossways;
Sheep's offal was offering apt for the piping shepherd;
And the ploughman in girdle of hide plied his goatskin thong,
As now they do who perform the rites
Of the wanton Lupercal.

No disciplined soldiers flashed their menacing weapons;
Unarmoured battle was joined with fire-hardened staves.
Lycmon, earliest of generals, wore a helmet
Of hide; King Tatius' wealth was mostly sheep.
Hence Rome's heroic stocks; hence Romulus' chariot
Of triumph that four white horses drew.
To a Rome so small Bovillae was reckoned no suburb;
A mere village like Gabii seemed to contain a throng;

And Alba, born of the sign the white sow had given,
Was a power when Fidenae seemed far from Rome.
From those ancient days the Roman inherits no more
Than his name, and would not suppose that a she-wolf
Was the nurse of his race.

It was well that Troy sent here her exiled Gods;
With what favouring signs the Trojan ship set sail!
The omens promised her well, for she'd suffered no harm
That day when the pinewood horse's belly opened;
When Anchises, tremulous, clung to the neck of his son
Whose dutiful shoulders no flame dared scorch.
Then the spirit of Decius came and the consular power
Of Brutus, and Venus herself brought the arms of Caesar—
Yes, the triumphant arms of resurgent Troy.
Fortunate land to receive Iulus' arms!
At her shrine by Avernus the tremulous Sibyl told
How Remus's death would avert all harm from the City;
And Cassandra's prophetic chant to ancient Priam,
Confirmed too late, thus bade the Greeks:
'Go; turn your horses around! Your conquest is vain.
Ilium's land will live and Jove
Will arm her ashes.'

You wolf of Mars, what better nurse could our state
Have had! What walls have sprung from that milk of yours!
Walls I would tell of in patriotic verses.
But, alas, how weak the notes that sound on my lips!
Yet, though from my feeble heart no more than a streamlet
May flow, it shall still be all for my country.
Let Ennius' poems be crowned with shaggy laurel:
For myself I ask you, Bacchus, for ivy leaves.
And so through my books may Umbria swell with pride—
Umbria, homeland of Rome's Callimachus.
Whoever shall see the towering height of Asis
As it climbs from the valley, let him value
Its walls by my talent.

Favour me, Rome: my work rises up for you.
And grant me, citizens, auguries of success.
'Troy', I will say, 'is to fall, and Trojan Rome
To arise.' Of Rome's long perils on land and sea
I will sing, and of holy rites and holy days
And ancient place-names. To pass this post
My horse must strain.

B. Horos the Seer replies ; and gives a Warning

Off course, Propertius, you rashly rush to sing
Your themes of Fate, spinning threads from no favouring distaff!
Your singing will bring only tears ; Apollo's against you ;
You ask your unwilling lyre for tunes
For which you'll be sorry.

I will tell you the truth, well-vouched, or no prophet am I,
Nor know how to spin the brazen celestial globe.
I am Horos ; my father was Orops of Babylon ; his
Was Archytas ; and Conon founded our house.
The Gods attest that I have not fallen away
From my family name ; in my books the truth has priority.
Men use the Gods for gain and fake for gold
Jove's words ; they use the recurring constellations
Of the slanting zodiac, yes, and the planets too—
Benevolent Jove, rapacious Mars, and Saturn
Baleful to all—and the starry signs of the Fishes,
Of the valiant Lion, and of Capricorn washed
By the Western Sea.

But I, when Arria brought her two sons forward
(For arm them she would although a God forbade it),
Foretold that they would not bring back their spears to the Gods
Of their hearth ; and see ! two tombs confirm me.
For Lupercus, protecting his horse's wounded face,
Took too little care, as it fell, for his own protection ;
While Gallus, guarding the camp's entrusted standards,
Fell dead by the eagle and stained its beak with his blood.
Doomed boys, through a mother's ambition you both were brought
To the grave. How much against my wishes
Did my words come true !

Then, too, when Juno, Goddess of births, protracted
Cinara's pains, and the weight in her womb still lingered,
'Juno will hear', I said, 'if you make a vow.'
The child was born and the prize was mine.
These truths not the sandy cave of Libyan Jove
Expounds, nor the entrails charged to speak for the Gods ;
Not the man who marks how the crow shall flap her wings,
Nor the phantom that rises from magic waters.
No : watch the celestial pathways ; take the right road
By the stars ; and then from the five zones seek
The certain truth.

Take warning from Calchas: at Aulis he loosed the ships
From the kindly rocks to which they so rightly clung.
So with Iphigenia's blood he imbrued the knife
And gave Agamemnon blood-stained sails.
Yet the Greeks were not to reach home. Now restrain your
weeping,
Uprooted Troy, and think of Euboea's bay,
Of Nauplius raising aloft his avenging flare
In the night, and of spoil-laden Greece become floating
wreckage.
Go, conquering Ajax—you know the result!—now ravish
Cassandra, dragged from the shrine of Pallas
Who forbade you to touch her.

No more of these stories: let me now turn to your stars:
Prepare with calm mind to hear more themes for tears,
Ancient Umbria bore you, of honoured stock:
Am I wrong? Or have I named your homeland?—
There, where the dews of misty Mevania moisten
The hollow plain, and the Umbrian Lake lies steaming
In the summer fields, and on Asis' high-climbing summit
Rise up the walls that through your talent
Are the more renowned.

Too early you gathered up your father's ashes;
And you had to accept a straitened hearth and home,
For many an ox had turned your rich lands over,
But the ruthless surveying rod took your wealth away.
Soon, when, your untried neck's gold locket gone,
Your mother's Gods had seen you don manhood's toga,
Apollo imparted some glimmerings of his poetry,
And forbade you, amidst the Forum's turmoil,
To thunder orations.

Write elegies, then (precarious task!), for here
Lies your field of battle; let others follow your lead.
With Venus' seductive weapons you'll fight in her wars,
For those boys of hers a suitable target.
And whatever successes all your toils achieve,
One girl there is to rob you of victory's palm.
Though you shake yourself free of the hook that was fast in your
jaw,
It will not avail: the barb will catch your chin.

At her whim you will look upon both the night and the day;
No tear will fall from your eye unless she commands it.
Set a thousand guards to watch her, or bar the door:
It will do you no good: if she means to deceive you,
A chink will suffice her.

Now, I tell you, your ship may struggle amidst the waves;
Unarmed yourself you may meet foes armed to the teeth;
The earth may quake and open a yawning chasm
At your feet: but reserve your fears for the sinister
Eight-footed crab!

IV.2 Vertumnus, God of Vicissitude

Why are you so surprised at my many shapes?
Let me tell you about the God Vertumnus' origins.
A Tuscan born of Tuscans, I feel no regret
To have left Volsinii's hearths in a time of battles.
This bustling throng is my joy, not an ivory temple;
Enough for me to look on Rome's Forum.
The Tiber once flowed this way, and the story goes
That the sound of oars was heard as they struck the water.
But then he gave up this ground to his foster-children,
And hence, some say, I am named Vertumnus
From the turning river.

Or is it because the first fruits of the turning year
Are offered to me that you think I'm called Vertumnus?
For me the first grapes change colour, the bunches darken;
For me the spiked ears swell up with milky grain.
At my shrine you may see sweet cherries and autumn plums,
And mulberries glowing red in the days of summer.
And here with a garland of fruit the grafter fulfils
His vow, for the pear-stock has grudgingly borne him
A crop of apples.

Away with false talk! There's another clue to my name;
Believe a god when he tells you about himself.
My nature's adapted to shapes of every kind;
I shall still look well, whatever I'm changed to.
In Coën silk I shall be no graceless girl;
But who will deny I'm a man if I don a toga?
With a scythe in my hand and a twist of hay round my forehead,
You'll swear it was I who mowed the meadow.
I once bore arms, and was praised, I recall, as a soldier;
A reaper I was with a basket's weight on my back.
Engaged in law-suits I'm sober enough; but when
I'm wearing a chaplet you'll say that the wine
Has gone to my head.

Given the proper head-dress I'll steal the part
Of Bacchus, or that of Apollo, given a lyre.
Furnished with nets I hunt; with a fowler's rod
I become the patron God of fowlers.

This seeming charioteer is Vertumnus too,
And this light-foot acrobat leaping from horse to horse.
If there's a rod I'll go fishing; or, neatly dressed
In loose tunic, I'll take the road and peddle my wares.
I can bend myself over a crook and be a shepherd,
Or bring baskets of roses to market through the dust.
For why need I add the source of my greatest renown—
That my hands are filled with the garden's choicest gifts?—
Cucumbers green as the sea are my badge, and gourds
With distended bellies, and cabbages tied with raffia.
And of all the flowers that bloom in the fields not one
But graces my head and droops across my brow.
Since then, though one, I assume all shapes, the tongue
Of this country, now mine, has found me a name
To suit what happens.

And you granted, Rome, their reward to my Tuscan kin,
From whom your Tuscan Road derives its name,
On the day that, led by Lycmon, their forces joined you
To crush fierce Tatius' Sabine army.
I saw the battle-line break and, arms cast aside,
The enemy turn their backs in shameful flight.
Now grant me, Jove, that the togaed throng of Rome
May pass forever to and fro
Before my feet.

Just a few more lines: don't wait if afraid to be late
For your law-suit. This is the final lap of my course.
Before Numa reigned I was just a maple-bole hewn
By a sickle in haste, a poor God in a grateful City.
But for you who shaped me in bronze, Mamurius,
May the rough earth not bruise your cunning hands—
You who could cast me for such adaptable ends:
A single work of art, but accorded
No single honour.

iv.3 To a Husband away at the Wars

A letter from Arethusa to her Lycotas—
If you're really mine when so often far away.
If parts have been blotted out beyond recovery,
The blots have all been made by my tears;
Or if the wavering outline of some of the letters
Leaves you perplexed, you will know how much
My right hand faltered.

Now Bactra has seen you visit the East once more,
And the Seric cataphracts too; now the wintry land
Of the Getans has seen you, the Britons' painted chariots,
Swart Indians pounded by Eastern seas.
What of the troth you plighted, the nights you promised
Of delight, when I yielded, a novice in love, to your siege?
That ominous wedding torch that lighted my way
To your house drew its smoky flame from some tumbled pyre.
A Stygian pool supplied the lustral water;
My chaplet was crooked; the God of Marriage
Denied his presence.

On every gate there hang my unhappy vows;
This cloak I now weave for your camps is the fourth I've woven.
A curse on the man who first from a harmless tree
Made a palisade, or a trumpet's harsh wail from bone!
Let him sit athwart like Ocnus and plait a grass rope
To feed forever a donkey's voracity.
Your corselet, now—does it gall your tender arms?
Or your heavy spear chafe hands not meant for war?
Yet I'd sooner you suffered such hurts than made me grieve
To think some girl had marked your neck with her love-bites.
They tell me your face wears a pinched and haggard look:
I only pray that your pallor is due
To your longing for me.

When evening ushers in the dreary night,
I kiss whatever weapons you've left behind you;
Then lie and complain that the clothes won't stay on the bed,
That the heralds of dawn neglect to sing.
Through winter nights I toil and spin for your wars,
Sewing lengths of fine cloth that will only encounter swords.

I learn where flows the Araxes that you must conquer,
How far without water a Parthian war-horse runs;
And by poring over a map depicting the world
I must grasp the design of a wise Creator,
And know which countries are stiff with frost, which crack
With heat, and which wind will blow your ship
Safe home to Italy.

One sister sustains me and, pale with care, my nurse
Swears, knowing it's false, that the wintertime delays you.
Happy Hippolyta! Fierce, bare-breasted Amazon,
She went to war, soft hair beneath her helmet.
If only our Roman camps were open to girls!
A faithful part I would be of your baggage,
Nor would the Scythian heights deter me when Jove
Turns deep water to ice in the freezing cold.
Great is the power of all love, and greater than any
Of love for a husband. Venus then fans it
And keeps it burning.

What use to me now is the sheen of purple robes
Or pellucid crystal rings to adorn my hands?
All is now silence; no more than once a month
My closed door opens for one girl friend.
Dear are the whimpers of Craugis, my little dog;
My only companion, she claims your side of the bed.
At the shrines I heap flowers, at the cross-roads sacred fronds;
On the ancient altars incense of savin crackles.
If on some nearby roof-tree the night-owl moans,
Or the flickering lamp requires a sprinkle of wine,
A this-year's lamb must be sacrificed next day,
And the priests, their robes tucked up, are hot
After still more fees.

Think less, I entreat you, of scaling Bactra's walls,
Of fine linen ripped from a perfumed chieftain's back,
When the twisted slings scatter wide their leaden shot,
And the cunning horsemen turn and twang their bow-strings.
But remember—and so, the Parthians tamed, may the spear-shaft,
The mark of valour, follow your horses of triumph—
Keep untarnished the covenant of my bed:
On no other terms do I want you back.
Then to the Capene Gate I'll carry your arms,
And write that a girl in gratitude offers them
For her husband's safety.

iv.4 Tarpeia's Treachery

I tell of Tarpeia's crime and the shameful death
She incurred and how the ancient home
Of Jove was captured.

Concealed in an ivy-clad cleft stood a noble grove
Whose myriad trees replied to the native springs—
Sylvanus's branch-dense haunt whither, out of the heat,
Sweet reed-pipes summoned the sheep to drink.
With a fence of maplewood Tatius enclosed the front
Of this grove, and guarded his camp with an earthen rampart.
What was Rome then when the Sabine trumpeter shook
Jove's sacred rocks nearby with his lingering call?
And, indeed, on the site of Rome's Forum, where now the laws
Are made for the conquered world, stood Sabine spears.
The hills were the only walls; where the Senate-house stands
Were sheepfolds; and war-horses used to drink
At the spring in the grove.

And hence came the water Tarpeia drew for the Goddess
She served; the earthenware urn weighed down her head.
(Could a single death be sentence enough for a girl
Who'd be false to Vesta's holy flame?)
On the sandy plain she saw Tatius at his practice;
His enamelled shield; his horse's yellow mane.
Amazed at his kingly beauty, his regal arms,
She let the urn she was carrying slip
Through her heedless hands.

Often, pretending to see in the innocent moon
Omens, she'd say she must bathe her hair in the stream;
And often she went, with gifts of silvery lilies,
To beg the sweet Nymphs to save Tatius from Roman spears.
Then climbed, as the first fires smoked, the misty Capitol,
Her arms all scratched by the shaggy brambles,
And sat on the peak that bears her name, and wept
At her love-wounds, to Jove, at his shrine nearby,
An offence past bearing.

'You camp fires', she cried, 'and you tents from which Tatius
rules
The Sabine host, and you arms, in my eyes so splendid,

Might I only sit before the Gods of your household,
A captive, yet able to look on my Tatius' face!
To the Roman hills, and to Rome that is built upon them,
Farewell, and to Vesta, so shamed by my sin.
That charger yonder whose mane, under Tatius' right hand,
Lies smooth on its neck, shall carry my heart to his camp.
No wonder that Scylla cut off her father's lock,
Her fair waist then sprouting those savage hounds;
Or that Ariadne betrayed the horned monster, her brother,
When the thread, wound in, made plain the tortuous way.
What infamy I shall bring upon Italy's maidens—
A traitress—and chosen to serve the virgin hearth!
Whoever marvels to see the Palladian fire
Extinct, let him grant me pardon; the altar
Is splashed with my tears.

'Tomorrow, it's said, there'll be drinking all through the City.
Go, Tatius, then, through the dew, up the thorny ridge:
A treacherous, slippery path whose deceptive margins
Hide everywhere patches of marshy water.
If only I knew the spells of the Muse of Magic!
I too might then have brought help to my handsome lover.
Royalty's robe suits you, not him whose mother
Brought him no honour, and whom the harsh teat
Of a wild wolf nourished.

'Let me hold court at Rome as your queen, my dowry—
No mean one, my foreign lover—Rome betrayed.
Or at any rate carry me off and requite the Romans,
That their rape of the Sabines may not go unavenged.
I have power to separate armies engaged in battle:
In the shade of my cloak of marriage make your treaty.
On with the marriage songs; hush the trumpet's fierce call.
My marriage-bed will assuredly soften
Your belligerent tempers.

'Now the fourth-watch bugles proclaim the coming dawn,
And into the Ocean the stars decline and sink.
Hoping for dreams of you, I will try to sleep.
Make sure you come, a kindly vision
To gladden my eyes.'

And now she gave up her limbs to restless sleep,
Not knowing a novel madness lay down beside her.

For holy Vesta who guards the Trojan embers
Fed her desires and augmented the fires in her bones.
She rushed away as the Bacchants do by the banks
Of swift Thermodon, tearing her clothes
And baring her breast.

This was the feast day the Fathers called Parilia,
The day of the year when the walls of Rome were begun,
The shepherds' annual banquet, the City's carnival,
When the villagers' platters drip with luscious fare,
And when over the scattered heaps of burning hay
With smoke-blackened feet leap the tipsy throng.
Romulus ordered the sentries to be at ease,
And the camp to remain in silence, no trumpet sounding.
This was Tarpeia's hour; and so she went
And met the King, and made her pact,
And joined the enemy.

The way up the hill was unsure, but the guards were feasting;
Tatius' quick sword forestalled the watch-dogs' bark.
Everything spoke of sleep; but Jove at least
Stayed wakeful, resolved on exacting vengeance.
She'd betrayed the gate and her country lying helpless,
And claimed her reward—to marry as soon as she chose.
But Tatius, a foe who accorded no honour to treason,
Said, 'Marry me now and ascend my royal bed';
Then told his men to crush her beneath the weight
Of their piled-up shields—a portion apt for her services.
From Tarpeia, its guide, the hill derived its name:
A distinction, false watcher of Vesta's fire,
To which you've no title.

iv.5 To a Procuress: may an Evil Fate be hers

May thorns, Acanthis, invest your grave, and the thirst
A bawd like you least wants torment your spirit;
May you find no rest when you're ashes; and may your vile ghost,
At vengeful Cerberus' hungry howling,
Be filled with terror!

With skill enough to subdue Hippolytus' qualms,
And always portending the worst for harmonious love,
She'd induce Penelope even, all word of her husband
Neglected, to marry the lecher Antinoüs.
If she liked she could make a magnet cease to attract
Iron, and a bird to its fledglings act like a stepmother.
Should she over a trench cast spells with her evil herbs,
The waters would rise and wash standing crops away.
She dared to bewitch the moon and impose her rule,
To assume the form of the wolf that prowls by night;
And, so that her cunning might blind over-vigilant husbands,
Tore out with her nails the eyes of poor crows.
She took counsel with vampire-owls to suck my blood,
And to ruin me gathered the lethal effusion
Of pregnant mares.

She went to work with flattering words like drops
That, steadily falling, bore out a stony pathway:
'If what you covet', she'd say, 'is eastern gold,
Or the purple the shell-fish flaunt in the Tyrian sea;
If dresses of Coän silk are your delight,
Or faded figures from golden tapestries,
Or, it may be, merchandise brought from palmy Thebes,
Or murrine wine-cups fired in the kilns of Parthia:
To gain your desires spurn faith, reject the Gods;
Let lies prevail and break every law
Of profitless chastity.

'Enhance your price with a sham protector; invent
Excuses; desire will grow when the night's deferred.
If he angrily ruffles your hair, turn his anger to profit;
When he's purchased a truce, extort still more.
Pretend, your fee now paid and your promise given,
That these are the days when Isis makes you abstain.
Tell your maids to keep talking of April, the month of Venus
And gifts, of your birthday to fall on the Ides of May.
When he comes entreating your favour, sit in your chair
And scribble a note; if such tricks perturb him, he's captured.
See that your neck shows signs of recent love-bites
That he'll think you acquired in a lovers' contest.
And never let yourself scold like too eager Medea;
She presumed to speak first and met with disdain.
Your better model is Thaïs, the costly courtesan
Who in witty Menander's comedy dupes
The crafty Scythians.

'Adapt your ways to the man's: if he's all for singing,
Join in the song; add your tipsy voice to his.
Let your doorman look out for givers; if poor men come,
Bid him be deaf and sleep against the barred door.
Don't scorn the soldier unfitted for making love,
Or the sailor with coins in his calloused hand,
Or one from whose barbarous neck a sale-ticket hung
When with whitened feet he jiggled about in the market.
Attend to the gold and not the hand that brings it.
And verses?—why, what are they but words?
If a man offers verses but gives you no silken gowns,
Let his penniless lyre stay mute for all your care.
While your blood's in the spring and your years still free from
wrinkles,
Make use of your time; tomorrow may sap your good looks.
I have seen the roses of fragrant Paestum; they seemed
All set for life, then, scorched by the South Wind
Of morning, lay dead.'

But Venus, my Queen, accept for the favour you've shown me
This ring-dove that now I sacrifice at your altar.
While Acanthis was working thus on my loved one's mind,
Through her tight-drawn skin you could count her bones.
I saw how her cough closed up her wrinkled throat,
And how through the gaps of her teeth oozed blood-flecked
spittle.

On her worn-out rug she was breathing her last rank breaths;
Her tumbledown hovel was fireless and shivering cold.
For her funeral rites let her have a stolen fillet
For her scanty hair, and a dirty, faded bonnet;
And for mourner a cur, the one that was all too watchful
When my fingers tried to unlatch the door.
And for tombstone—one fit for a bawd—a broken old wine-jar,
With a fig-tree on top to exert a downward thrust.
If you know what love is, then pelt this grave of hers
With squalid stones, and mingle with them
Your maledictions.

iv.6 The Battle of Actium

The poet-priest is performing the rites of the Muses.
Favour with silence. A heifer must fall at the shrine.
Let Roman garlands now vie with the ivy wreath
Of Philetas, the urn pour Callimachean draughts.
Offer sweet spikenard and soothing incense; thrice
Wreath strands of wool round the new-raised altar.
Sprinkle me now with pure water, and let the pipe
Of ivory make a libation of Phrygian music.
May deceit be far off, wrongs under another sky.
For the priest the unsullied laurel makes smooth
His novel road.

Calliope, now, my Muse, we will tell of the temple
Of Palatine Phoebus—a theme that deserves your favour.
For the glory of Caesar I spin a song; while he
Is my subject, let even Jove attend.
On Phoebus' Epirot coast a haven recedes—
A gulf that muffles the roar of Ionian waters.
The wide sea here at Actium never troubles
The sailors' prayers, and preserves the memory
Of Caesar's warships.

Here came the world for battle; vast structures of wood
Towered on the sea, but different the fates of their oars.
One fleet had been doomed by Rome's founder God, and there
Our spears were held—what shame!—in a woman's hand;
But Augustus' ships carried sails that Jove had blest,
And standards already taught to conquer
On behalf of their country.

Now Nereus the Sea-God had formed twin crescent lines,
And, blazoned with glint of weapons, the water shimmered,
When Phoebus left Delos, the island he'd now made firm—
Though once it moved at the whim of the angry South Wind—
On Augustus' prow he stood, and a sudden flame
Flashed thrice like the torch of the zigzag lightning.
He had not come with his hair flowing loose on his neck,
Or with songs of peace to sing to his tortoiseshell lyre;
His countenance now was as when he abashed Agamemnon,
And emptied the Grecian camp for the greedy pyres;

Or when he slew the Python, the Muses' terror,
And loosened through all those sinuous coils
Its snaky crawling.

Then he said, 'O Caesar Augustus, the world's defender,
Of Alban stock and surpassing your Trojan forbears,
Now conquer at sea; already the land is yours:
For you fight my bow and these arrows that burden my shoulder.
Release your country from fear that, relying on you
For protection, has loaded your ship with her prayers.
If you fail to defend her, then Romulus augured ill
For the walls of Rome when he saw those birds
On the Palatine Hill.

'Too close their oars now venture: what shame if the seas
Round Latium bear, while you rule, the sails of a queen!
No cause for alarm if each ship in their fleet is winged
With a hundred oars: they sail in an adverse sea;
And the menacing Centaurs they bear on their prows will prove
Just pieces of wood and painted terrors.
It's the cause that breaks or exalts a soldier's strength;
If the cause is unjust, from his hand shame strikes his weapon.
Now is the time; engage the enemy; I,
Who appoint the hour, will lead your ships on
With laurelled hand.'

He finished speaking, and now his bow consumed
His quiver's load, and Caesar's spear came next.
Phoebus kept faith; Rome conquered; the woman paid:
On Ionian waves her shattered sceptre floated.
Then Caesar, Augustus' sire, from his star, in wonder
Said, 'I am a God, and you prove you are of our blood.'
And Triton in salutation blew his trumpet,
While the sea-nymphs cheered round the standards of freedom.
But that woman, in profitless flight, now sought the Nile,
Winning only the right to choose the day of her death.
The Gods knew best: a poor triumph—just one woman
In those self-same streets through which Jugurtha was led!
From this victory Actian Phoebus won his temple,
For every arrow shot from his bow
Struck down ten ships.

Enough of war: triumphant Apollo now calls
For my lyre, and lays down his arms for the dances of peace.

Let the guests, white-robed, repair to the pleasant grove
While round my head the sweetness of roses twines.
Pour out the wine that was crushed in Falernian presses;
With Cilicean saffron drench my hair.
Let the Muse inspire her poets inflamed with wine;
Bacchus is always prolific of themes
For his own Apollo.

First let us sing of how the Sycambri, the marshmen,
Are now our slaves, then of Cepheus' dusky realm;
And next of the Parthians, slow to submit and make peace:
Let them now restore our standards, soon yield their own.
Or else, should Augustus spare the Eastern archers,
Let the trophies of war await his sons.
And let Crassus, if sentient now in his sandy darkness,
Rejoice: we may cross the Euphrates and visit his grave.
Thus I will pass the night amid the bumpers
And amid the songs till day shall cast
Its rays in my wine.

iv.7 The Revenant

Ghosts are realities ; death not the end of all :
The wan shadow defeats the funeral pyre
And evades its fires.

Yes : over my bed I saw my Cynthia stoop
Whose ashes were lately entombed by the highway's murmur.
Sleep hung back from me after the funeral rites
Of my love, as now I lay lamenting
My bed's chill kingdom.

Her hair was the same as when she was carried out ;
Her eyes were the same ; her scorched dress clung to her side,
And the fire had corroded her favourite beryl ring.
And though Lethe's withering water had touched her lips,
She spoke in a voice that was full of the animation
Of living breath, as the knuckles creaked
Of her brittle hands.

'Tell me, you cheat, whom no girl need expect
To be true, can sleep have power tonight to hold you?
Are they all forgotten—our stolen nights in the haunts
Where no one sleeps, and my sill worn smooth by our stratagems?
How often I've swung on the rope let down from that window,
As hand over hand I came to your arms !
And how often, too, we took what Venus gives,
And, breast to breast, made the very pavement
Warm with our loving !

'But alas for our secret pact, whose deceitful words
The unheeding winds have dissipated !
Why, no one called to stay my departing eyes :
If you had invoked me, one more day had been won.
And no watcher sounded the rattle to ward off evil,
While the broken tile that served me for pillow
Bruised my head.

'Then who saw you by my bier with shoulders bowed?
Or your mourning robe steaming with scalding tears?
As far as the gates, if it irked you to go beyond,
You might have bidden the bearers march more slowly.

Then why were the winds not called on to fan my pyre?
And why from my flames, O ingrate, no odour of spikenard?
Were a few cheap hyacinth flowers for my pyre too much,
Or to break a wine-jar and pour for my spirit
A pious libation?

‘Let Lygdamus scorch; make the irons glow bright for your
slave!

I sensed the pallor that lurked in that wine I drank.
And let cunning Nomas hide her secret potions;
The fiery shard will soon declare
The guilt of her hands!

‘She whose cheap nights were just now on public offer,
Trails on the ground today her gold-trimmed gown,
And repays with an unjust load for the sewing basket
Any chattering work-girl who mentions my pretty looks.
Dear Petale took a wreath of flowers to my tomb,
And now in old age feels the chain and the squalid clog;
While Lalage, daring to ask a boon in my name,
Is tied by her twisted hair and beaten.
And you let that woman melt my golden bust,
Who designed, from the pyre she made of me,
To procure a dowry.

‘But, though you deserve them, Sextus, no harsh words:
Long has been my reign in your books of verses.
By Fate’s irreversible spell I swear—and so
May Cerberus soften the growls of his triple throat!
I have kept the faith I pledged to you. If I lie
Let the viper hiss on my grave and make
Its bed on my bones!

‘Yes: two abodes are the lot of those who voyage
On death’s noisome river; they row their separate ways.
One current carries Clytemnestra’s shame
And that wooden monster, the mimic Cretan cow.
But see! a garlanded boat bears off the others
To where the breezes caress the Elysian rose
And where the Lydian harps and melodious lutes
And Cybele’s clashing cymbals sound
For the holy dances.

‘Andromeda, Hypermestra—all the wives
Who were faithful—there relate their famous stories.

One tells how her undeserving arms were bruised,
When chained for her mother's fault to those cold, bleak crags.
The other describes the monstrous crime her sisters
Dared to do, and how her own heart quailed.
And so, with death's tears, we sanctify the loves
Of our lives; but your many breaches of faith
I pass over in silence.

'Now hear my wishes—supposing you're free to listen;
That Chloris's brews haven't made you completely hers.
Let my nurse Parthenië want for nothing now
In her tremulous years; she was never after your money.
And Latris, my little darling, who takes her name
From her tasks, let her hold up the mirror to no new mistress.
Then all the verses you've written on my account
Burn in my honour and make me no longer
A theme for praise.

'And repel from my tomb the ivy, prolific of berries,
That with tangle of tendrils involves my delicate bones.
And where fruitful Anio broods over branch-dense meadows,
And Hercules' spell keeps ivory free from stain,
Write on a column this legend, not unworthy,
But brief that a rider who hurries from Rome may read:
"Here in Tiburtine soil lies golden Cynthia.
Greater the glory now of your banks
O River Anio!"

'And do not, Sextus, despise the visions that come
Through the Gate of the Blest; such hallowed visions have
weight.
We ride on the night that frees imprisoned shadows,
And Cerberus too, unchained, then wanders at large.
At dawn, by the law, we return to the pools of Lethe;
The ferryman rows us across, nor fails
To count his freight.

'Now others may have you; soon you'll be mine alone.
With me you shall stay and our bones I'll crumble
In one confusion.'

And now, as she made an end of complaint and contention,
From between my arms that tried to clasp her
Ghostlike she vanished.

iv.8 An Interrupted Supper Party

Hear what made all the folks on the watery Esquiline
So scared last night they were running around
In the New Park meadows.

From of old an ancient snake has guarded Lanuvium:
For something so rare a stay of an hour's well spent.
Down through a cave's dark mouth drops the sacred path
(O maiden, take care!) by which the offering reaches
The hungry snake demanding his annual tribute
With hisses spiralling up from the depths.
The maidens sent down to perform such rites turn pale
As they rashly entrust their hands to the serpent's mouth.
He snatches the morsels of food the maiden proffers,
In whose fingers the very basket trembles.
Girls who've been chaste return to their parents' arms,
And then the farmers proclaim that the year
Is bound to be fruitful.

It was here that her short-clipped ponies brought my Cynthia;
To honour Juno she came—or rather Venus.
Let the Appian Way report her triumphal journey
As over its paving stones whirled her wheels.
What a sight, as, leaning forward right over the yoke-pole,
She boldly drove at full speed over holes and bumps;
Not to mention her close-shaved playboy's silk-lined carriage
And Molossian hounds with jewelled collars.
One day, when his conquering whiskers shame his smooth cheeks,
He will hire out his life and eat the coarse fare
Of a gladiator.

As Cynthia so many times had wronged our bed
I resolved on a change: I would move my camp elsewhere.
On the Aventine close by Diana one Phyllis lives:
Sober she's nothing, but drinking she's charm itself.
And there's Teia, a dazzler whose home's on the Capitol;
Fill her with wine and no man's her match.
Let them come, I decided, to brighten my cheerless night;
I would try to revive my taste for intrigue
With an untried amour.

A dining couch just for three in a quiet recess
On the lawn. Our places? Why I was between the girls.
Lygdamus managed the drinks: there were wine-cups of glass
For the summer, and wine that tasted of Greece.
From the Nile a piper; a girl on the castanets;
And roses, artlessly fair, all ready for strewing,
While Magnus himself, with his dwarfish, thick-set limbs,
Waved stunted hands in time to a boxwood flute.
But the lamps, though filled with oil, would only flicker,
And the legs of the table gave way and down it fell.
When at dice I wanted a double six—the throw
Of Venus—two aces—the damnable ‘Dogs’—sprang at me.
To the songs of the girls I was deaf; when they bared their
 breasts,
I was blind; yes, all alone I stood
By the gates of Lanuvium.

Then all of a sudden the sound of creaking hinges
And a murmur of voices away in the entrance hall;
And at once the doors are flung back, and there stands Cynthia,
A fury, her hair all ruffled, but oh! how lovely!
My nerveless fingers let go of my wine-cup; my lips,
Agape with wine, turned deadly pale.
Lightning flashed from her eyes; she raged as only
A woman can; it was like a city’s sack.
Into Phyllis’s face she dashed vindictive nails;
Teia in terror cried ‘Fire’ to all around.
Lamps were brandished; the sleeping citizens woke;
The whole street rang with the midnight madness.
The girls, their hair laid waste and their clothes awry,
Found refuge in the nearest tavern
Of a dingy side-street.

Victorious Cynthia now returned exulting
In her spoils, and gave my face a back-handed slap;
She bit my neck and drew blood; then made a dead set
At my eyes (that I don’t deny deserved it).
At length, when her arms were weary from all this hitting,
She dragged out Lygdamus, hidden behind the back
Of the couch, and begging my guardian spirit for aid;
But what could I do when there I was,
His fellow-captive?

With suppliant hands at last I sued for peace
Though she’d hardly let me even touch her feet.

'If you want me', she said, 'to pardon the crime you've committed,
Then hear what the terms of my pact will be.
You shall not stroll, all dressed up, in Pompey's Portico,
Or in the licentious Forum sanded for fights.
And mind you don't gaze up at the women's seats
In the theatre, or loiter beside an uncurtained litter.
And, before all else, let Lygdamus, principal cause
Of my plaint, now go for sale, his feet
Dragging double fetters.'

She'd laid down her terms: I was ready, I said, to accept them.
And now that her rule was established, she proudly smiled.
Then every spot those girls from without had touched
She fumigated, and cleansed the threshold with water.
And all my clothes I must change, not once, but twice,
And thrice she touched my head with burning sulphur.
Then, when the bed-clothes had all been changed as well,
I answered her mood; and so we made peace
All over the bed.

iv.9 Hercules Athirst

Hercules, son of Amphytryon, driving his cattle
From their Erythean byre, reached the Palatine Hill,
Then a grazing ground for flocks and untamed by man;
And he stayed the weary oxen, himself as weary,
Where the Velabrum then lay beneath its stream
And mariners sailed right through the midst
Of the future city.

But the herd was not left untouched; a faithless host
Was Cacus, who by his theft dishonoured Jove.
This brigand lived nearby in a cave of dread,
And spoke from three mouths with a triple voice;
And so that there might be no manifest signs of his thieving,
He dragged the cattle tail first into his cave.
But the God was witness; the lowing cattle cried 'thief';
And the rage of Hercules shattered the robber's
Relentless doors.

So Cacus lay dead, his three skulls beaten in
By the club of Hercules, who to the oxen said:
'Forward my herd, last labour of my club;
Forward. Twice have I sought you, twice made you mine.
Hallow this place where you graze with your long-drawn lowing.
Your pasture in time to come shall be
Rome's world-famed Forum.'

He'd spoken and now his parched mouth was tormented by
thirst,

Yet the earth that teems with water had none for him.
But he heard a little way off the laughter of girls
Where a shady ring of trees formed a sacred grove,
A sanctuary with its holy springs, devoted
To the Goddess of Women whose rites no man must know.
Festoons of purple veiled the secluded entrance;
At the age-worn shrine a fire of sweet incense glowed;
While a poplar standing before it proffered the beauty
Of spreading fronds, with abundant shade
For the birds that sang there.

Hither he rushed, his beard all matted with dust,
And before the doors he spoke these ungodlike words:

'You, so joyful here in this grove, I beg you
Open your ready shrine to a weary man.
I wander athirst, the sound of water all round me;
A cupped handful drawn from the brook would do.
Have you heard of one who bore the sky on his back?
I am he; Alcides the world I reconquered calls me.
Who does not know of the feats of Hercules' club,
Of the weapons that never failed against monstrous beasts,
Of the only man for whom Stygian gloom shone bright?
As I reach this corner of earth I still drag out
My doom; though so wearied now, this land
Is loath to receive me.

Vengeful Juno, were she the Goddess you worshipped,
Wouldn't play the stepmother, barring me from her springs.
But if my visage and lion's mane and hair
Scorched by the Libyan sun alarm you,
I too have done menial work in a purple gown
And spun with a Lydian distaff my daily portion;
And so, a soft breast-band around my hairy chest,
I proved, however horny my hands,
A deft enough girl.'

Thus Hercules; but the kindly priestess answered,
Her hoary locks tied back with a purple band:
'Spare now, stranger, your eyes; depart from here;
From this awesome grove and these doors find safety in flight.
Forbidden the altar this secret building guards
To men by a law none dares to break.
At heavy cost the prophet Tiresias saw
Pallas bathing, her Gorgon shield laid by.
May the Gods provide you with other streams; our water,
Hidden away in its secret channel,
Flows only for women.'

At her words he struck with his shoulder the shadowy door-posts;
The closed portal could not withstand the rage of his thirst.
When to quench the fire in his throat he'd drunk up the stream,
He pronounced with lips scarcely dry this doom:
'The Great Altar at Rome I have vowed to make with my hands
In return for these cattle, the greatest altar of all—
Let it never admit any woman to worship before it,
That Hercules' thirst may be avenged
To the end of time!'

This hero who purged and sanctified the world
The Sabines of old called Sancus and built him a temple.
Hail, Sancus our Sire, who have gained cruel Juno's smile,
In my book, I pray you, now take your place
And grant me your blessing!

iv.10 Spoils for Jupiter

I will tell you the tale of Feretrian Jove's beginnings,
Of the spoils of combat won from each of three leaders:
An arduous climb but its glory gives me strength;
There can be no pleasure in garlands plucked
From easy summits.

Romulus first showed the way to win the palm
And came home laden with spoils he'd won from the enemy.
Caeninian Acron, who threatened Rome's gates, he vanquished;
With his spear he struck him down, both man and horse:
Yes, Acron, of Hercules' stock, from Caenina's citadel
The commander, and once the terror of Rome.
He had dared to hope for spoil from Romulus' back,
But himself was to yield the spoil imbrued with his blood.
By the hollow towers he levelled his spear, but Romulus
Forestalled him, making a vow accepted in heaven:
'Acron today shall be Jupiter's sacrifice';
And as he had vowed so Acron fell,
A spoil for Jove.

Thus he used to win wars, the Father of Rome and Rome's
prowess,
Exchanging his frugal home for the cold of the camp.
The rider, deft with his rein, was deft at the plough;
His helmet of wolf-hide sported no horsehair plume;
His shield did not glow with enamels and plated bronze;
And his pliant belt a dead ox had furnished.
No sound of war had been heard beyond the Tiber,
Nomentum Rome's farthest spoil and Cora's
Few captured acres.

The second victor was Cossus : he killed Tolumnius,
Lord of Veii, a city then hard to conquer.
Alas for ancient Veii, a kingdom then
With a golden throne set up in her market place!
Now within her walls the slow-paced shepherd's horn
Sounds, and amid her citizens' bones
Folks reap the corn.

On the tower above Veii's gate her commander stood ;
He parleyed, confident of his city's strength,
While the bronze-horned ram was battering at the walls,
A mantlet protecting the line of siege-works.
Cried Cossus : 'The brave should meet on the field of battle.'
There was no delay : each took his stand on the plain.
The Gods lent their aid to Rome, and her horses were splashed
With the blood that gushed from the severed neck
Of Veian Tolumnius.

Claudius, third of the victors, beat back from the Rhine
The foe who had crossed it ; he brought home the shield of their
chief,
The giant Virdomarus, boasting descent from the River
And quick to rush forward and hurl his spears from his chariot.
As clothed in striped breeches he dashed from his battle-line
To make his throw, from his severed throat
Fell his twisted necklace.

Three spoils are now stored in the temple of Jove the Striker :
Leader struck leader down with auspicious sword.
Or else, since the victors' backs bore the arms of the slain,
The proud shrine was devoted to Jove Feretrius,
Jove the Bearer.

IV.11 Cornelia's Vindication

Trouble my grave now, Paullus, with no more tears;
There are no prayers to open the sable gates.
When beneath the Underworld's sway the dead once fall,
The ways are blocked with relentless steel.
Though the God of the hall of darkness may hear you pray,
The deaf shore of Styx will assuredly soak up your tears.
Heaven may respond to your prayers; when the Stygian ferryman
Has been paid, the wan portal shuts on the shadowy world.
This was the strain the mournful trumpets sounded
When the pitiless torch applied to my bier
Drew my body away.

My marriage to Paullus, my forbears' triumphal chariot,
My children, sure pledges of fame—what help were these?
The Fates were no less obdurate; what remains
Of Cornelia now five fingers could lift.
Though into the darkness of doom, and amid these shallows
And stagnant pools and ripples involving my feet,
I come before my time, yet guiltless I come.
With mercy, therefore, I pray that Pluto
May deal with my spirit.

Or if some Aeäcus sits, all ready to judge me,
Let me be arraigned and let him pronounce his sentence.
Let his brothers sit at his side, the grim band of Furies
Standing by, the whole court expectant.
Let Sisyphus rest from his stone; Ixion's wheel
Be quiet; the water cease mocking Tantalus' lips.
Let ferocious Cerberus pounce on no shades today,
And his chain hang loose from the silent door-bar.
I shall plead my own cause; if I lie, then may the urn,
The Danaïd sisters' unhappy doom,
Oppress my shoulders.

If there's glory in martial honours by ancestors won,
Then the busts in the hall of my father speak of the Scipios,
And my mother's line can match them with the Libonēs:
Great names support my house on either side.
And when to the wedding torch my girlish dress
Gave way and a matron's fillet bound my hair,

To you I was joined, my Paullus, soon to leave you :
A wife once only, this stone declares.
I call my ancestral spirits whom Rome reveres,
Whose monuments picture Africa lying prone,
And Perseus, roused by the thought of his forbear, Achilles,
And Hercules, too, who forced the Avernian gates—
I call them to witness I've bent no censor's law ;
For no lapse of mine has my family blushed.
Cornelia never tarnished such shining spoils.
No : she has set, to so great a house,
An example to follow.

My life did not alter ; the whole was free from reproach ;
From the wedding torch to the funeral's we lived in honour.
Nature imposed on me laws derived from my lineage ;
No fear of a judge was needed to make me better.
Whatever court should pass harsh sentence upon me,
To sit at my side no woman were shamed—
Not Claudia, matchless servant of tower-crowned Cybele,
Who hauled to safety the Goddess's lagging image,
Nor Aemilia, who on the hearth laid her linen robe
And revived the fire of Vesta she'd sworn to preserve.
And you I have never shamed, sweet mother, Scribonia ;
Nothing in me would you change except my death.
My mother's tears and the City's grief commend me,
And Caesar's sorrow defends my shade,
Who exclaimed with godlike tears against the Fates
That all my life I had been to his daughter
A worthy sister.

I bore three children, thus gaining the stole of honour ;
From no barren home have I now been snatched away.
Lepidus, yes, and Paullus, even in death
Are my solace ; I closed my eyes in their arms.
My brother I saw elected twice to high office,
Then consul ; as all were rejoicing, his sister died.
And my daughter, born to reflect her father's honour—
May she imitate me and embrace one husband alone.
To our line they shall all be pillars ; with so many left
To continue my life, let my boat set sail.
To be praised when the pyre's burnt out and all are free
To speak their minds is a woman's reward
And final triumph.

Now Paullus, to you I entrust our children, the pledges
Of our love; burned into my ashes, this care still lives.
You, their father, must also play the part
Of their mother, your shoulders sustaining them all.
When they cry, kiss their tears away, and add a mother's
Kisses too. The home is all in your charge.
If grief overcomes you, grieve when they are not there;
When they're with you, deceive their kisses with cheeks wiped dry.
For remembering me let the nights that you weary out
Suffice, and the dreams when often you think you see me.
And as to this semblance of me you talk in secret,
Utter each word as though to one
Who was going to answer.

But if the house should see a new marriage bed
And a stepmother takes my place, still feeling her way,
Then, children, praise and accept your father's wife;
Charmed by your ways she will give you her heart.
Mind, though, you do not overpraise your mother;
A comparison made too freely will give offence.
But if your father shall rest content with my memory
And, though I'm just ashes, shall value me no less,
Learn now to know the signs of approaching age,
And shut out the cares of his widowed state.
May the years that are taken from me accrue to you,
And so through my children may Paullus find pleasure in age.
It has fallen out well: as a mother I never wore
Mourning garb; to the rites of my funeral
Came all my children.

So ends my defence. As you weep for me, rise, my witnesses,
While kindly earth passes sentence on my life.
Heaven stands open to virtue; so let me be judged
A spirit worthy to take the road
To my honoured forbears.

Appendix

The pronunciation of proper names

The conventional English pronunciation of Greek and Latin proper names is very insular; it has nothing to do with the pronunciation scholars believe the ancient Greeks and Romans used or with that used by modern Greeks and Italians.

The following are a few guides:

1. All consonants and single vowels are pronounced as in English except that *ch* is pronounced *k*. In particular *c* and *g* are soft before *e* and *i*. *ci*, *si* and *ti* followed by *a* and *us* always used to be pronounced as in *nation*, but now there is a growing tendency to pronounce these letters as they are spelt; thus *Marcius* is now often pronounced *Mar-se-us* instead of the former *Marshus*. *Propertius*, however, is always *Propérshus*.

2. Final *e* is always a separate syllable (e.g., *Penelope* is pronounced *Pen-él-o-py*), except in anglicized forms like *Prósérpine* (from *Prosérpina*).

3. Diphthongs are usually pronounced as in English; but note:

- (a) *ei* is pronounced *i*; e.g. *Pleiades*, pronounced *Plý-a-des*: except that in *Tarpéia* it is always pronounced *e*.
- (b) *oe* is pronounced *e*; e.g. *Boeotia*, pronounced *Bee-ó-sha*.
- (c) *eu* is pronounced *ew* as in *few*; e.g. *Perseus* is a disyllable pronounced *Per-suce* to rhyme with *puce*.
- (d) *ea* and *oo* are not diphthongs; e.g., *Meándér*, *Boótes*.
- (e) pairs of vowels do not always form diphthongs:
e.g.—

- (i) *ai*, *ay*, in names like *Thaïs* (pronounced *Thay-is*); *Taygetus* (pronounced *Tay-ig-et-us*). *Naiad* is anomalously pronounced *Ni-ad*.

- (ii) ei at the beginning of names like Deïdamia pronounced Deé-i-dam-i-a.)
- (iii) au at the end of names like Menelaüs (pronounced Mén-e-láy-us).

4. The incidence of the accent follows the rules of classical Latin, i.e.

- (a) In words of two syllables the accent falls on the first.
- (b) In words of more than two syllables the accent falls on the penultimate if this is long, but otherwise on the ante-penultimate.
- (c) A syllable is long—
 - (i) If it contains a long vowel or diphthong; e.g. Patróclus, Poséidon;
 - (ii) If its vowel, though short, is followed by two or more consonants or by one of the double consonants x or z; e.g. Hyperméstra, Ulýsses, Aráxes.
- (d) There is no rule for determining whether a vowel is long or short; this has to be learnt for each name. Analogy sometimes helps but may be a dangerous guide.

Notes

A reader who would like information about some point in a poem but finds no mention of it in the Notes to that poem should look it up in the Index to the Notes; it may be dealt with in the Notes to another poem.

Many Gods and Goddesses have two names, because the Romans equated their more important deities with members of the Greek pantheon who seemed to correspond. Propertius usually, but not always, uses the Roman names. In the following Notes the Roman names are given, followed, the first time they occur, by the Greek names in brackets.

To enable the reader to locate the lines to which the notes refer, the stanzas and lines have been given, in abbreviated form, followed by the appropriate numbers, before each note. This applies more particularly where the poem is a long one.

Book I

1. s.1, l.5, '*Girls who withhold*, etc., see pp. 30-1.

s.2, l.1, *Milánion*: ditto and pp. 23-4.

s.2, l.1, *Tullus*: a friend of Propertius; nephew of Lucius Volcaci^{us} Tullus, who was consul 33 B.C. and proconsul of Asia 30-29 B.C.; addressed also in 1.6, 14 & 22 and III.22. In 1.6 Propertius mentions Tullus's uncle, in whose entourage Tullus evidently went to Asia; he was still there when III.22 was written.

s.3, l.1, *You who pretend to drag the moon*, etc.: apparently a practice of witches in antiquity: see also II.28B. Diana (Artemis), the Moon Goddess, was also Hécate, patroness of witches, and Trivia, Goddess of Crossroads (see II.32, 3rd stanza and note thereon), always a site of magical rites. Presumably the witches hoped by their incantations to direct the moon's power to their own ends.

2. See II.18c for a poem on a similar theme.

s.1, 1.3, *Coän silk*: the finest silk came from Cos in the Dodecanese. It was expensive, very sheer, and considered 'fast' by the respectable. The cocoons from which it was made were of a different insect from the silkworm of China.

s.3, 1.4, *Phoebus* = Apollo. Jupiter (Zeus, pronounced Zewce) intervened in the quarrel over Marpessa, and, with pleasing impartiality, awarded her, not to his son Apollo, but to her husband.

s.4, 1.2, *Apélles*: a celebrated painter of the time of Alexander the Great.

s.5, 1.7, *Minerva* (Pallas Athéne) was patroness of the liberal arts.

3. s.1, 1.2, *A girl from Cnossos*: Ariádne, whom Theseus deserted on the Island of Naxos and Bacchus then married. She became a star in the sky.

s.2, 1.2, *Link-boys*: perhaps an anachronistic expression. They were slaves. Policing was not too efficient, and after dark such an escort was desirable.

s.2, 1.13, *Io the strange-horned*: Io was a girl beloved of Jupiter, and when his wife Juno (Hera) found out, she turned her into a cow; or, according to another version, Jupiter did it in the hope of saving her from Juno's wrath. Anyway, Juno set Argus the hundred-eyed to watch her and for long persecuted her; but after protracted travels she ultimately reached Egypt, where she regained her womanly form and became the Goddess Isis; see II.33A and Note. Propertius often mentions her both as Io and Isis.

4. s.1, 1.1, *Bassus*: friend of Propertius; a satiric poet whose work is lost.

5. s.1, 1.6, *Thessaly*: country of witches, experts in poisons.

s.5, 1.2, *Ancestral portraits*: really portrait masks that were kept in recesses off the *atrium* or entrance hall of a house. And see lines 2-3 of II.13B.

s.7, 1.1, *Gallus*: friend of Propertius, referred to again in I.10, 13 & 20, but clearly not the Gallus of I.21; nor could he have been Cornelius Gallus, the soldier-poet (see pp. 33-4), for the

poet, besides being some twenty years older than Propertius, was not of noble birth, as was our Gallus: see the 5th stanza. For the same reason Aelius Gallus (see III.12 and Note) is not the man. In fact this Gallus cannot be identified.

6. s.1, 1.4, *Rhipéan Mountains*: in the extreme north of Europe. s.1, 1.5, *Realm of Memnon*: Ethiopia, the extreme south of the known world.

s.2, 1.2, *Her ever-changing colour*: now pale, now flushed—for Propertius always a symptom of love: see, e.g. I.15, last stanza. s.6, 1.2, *Pactólus*: a river, often mentioned by Propertius, in which King Midas bathed, whereupon its sands, like all else he touched, turned to gold.

7. s.1, 1.1, *Pónticus*: a friend of Propertius, a contemporary poet, who wrote a poem, now lost, on the Theban War, which was fought between two brothers.

s.3, 1.3, *Your Camps and Seven Hosts*: references to the Theban War and Ponticus's poem: see last Note.

8A. *The rival from Illyria* appears again in II.16 and probably in III.20A. Presumably he held an important post there.

s.2, 1.2, *The Pleiades* rose at the beginning of April and then one might put to sea. And see Note on II.16.

s.3, 1.4, *Óricos*: a celebrated port on the coast of Epírus. The dangerous *Ceraunian rocks* were near.

8B. s.2, 1.6, *Elis*: Híppodamíá's kingdom, where they bred the chariot horses for the Olympic games.

9. s.2, 1.1, *Dodóna*: an ancient oracle of Jupiter in the mountains of Epírus. Here grew a grove of oaks, and in the rustling of 'the dim leaves that trembled around Dodona' was heard the voice of the God. Signs were probably drawn, also, from the cooing and flight of the sacred doves that lived in the trees. The priestesses at the shrine were known as Doves (*Columbae*), and whether Propertius meant them or the birds is uncertain; the priestesses are the better guess.

s.3, 1.2, *City of lyre-raised walls*: Thebes: see Note on III.2.

s.3, 1.3, *Mimnérmus*: see p. 32.

s.5, 1.2, *Hades' wheel*: The one to which Ixíon was bound.

10. s.1, l.3. *How keen a pleasure*, etc.: all the keener, perhaps, because Propertius might now expect Gallus to leave Cynthia alone (see 1.5).

11. s.1, l.1, *Baiae* (usually, in the same way as Naiad, pronounced Bay-ee or By-ee according to taste): a fashionable seaside resort near Naples. A causeway, constructed, so legend said, by Hercules, ran along the shore (see also III.18).

12. s.1, l.4, *The Don and the Tiber*: the modern names of the rivers Propertius mentions are the Bug (probably) and the Po. I have substituted names less inimical to the pathetic effect he was aiming at. The 'miles' are metaphorical.

s.2, l.4, *Caucasian Heights*: far away in the East and therefore mysterious.

s.3, l.1, *Long journeys*: we do not know where to. The journey to Baiae (see 1.11) would hardly be long, even in those days.

13. s.7, l.1, *Leda*: the girl whom Jupiter, disguised as a swan, seduced; or, according to Yeats's version, raped with world-shattering results. The three children are Helen of Troy, and Castor and Pollux, the Heavenly Twins (*Gemini*) of the Zodiac.

14. s.1, l.2, *Lesbian wine*: from the Island of Lesbos; mild, sweetish and expensive.

s.1, l.2, *Mentor*: a celebrated Greek engraver of metal, fourth century B.C.

16. This poem is what the Greeks called a '*paraclausithyron*'—'the song sung by the lover at his mistress's door, after he has been refused admission to her home.' Such poems have quite a history, very interestingly told by F. O. Copley in *Exclusus Amator* (American Philological Society, 1956). Propertius's is one of the last and best. See also p. 14.

s.8, l.5, *What my vows have promised*, etc.: no doubt garlands, as though the door were an altar: see the first stanza of this poem.

17. s.1, l.3, *Cassiope*: a port in the Island of Corcyra (Corfu). Some take Propertius to mean Cassiope or Cassiopéa, Queen of Ethiopia, who became a constellation; but why *she* should want to see him again is not clear.

s.4, l.7, *The fires of Castor and Pollux*: the corporant or fire of

St Elmo, a discharge of static electricity seen, on stormy nights, on the masts and riggings of ships. If you see twin fires, rejoice, for then you can be sure the Heavenly Twins, firm friends of seafaring men, are at hand; but beware of a single fire, denoting the baleful presence of Helen of Troy.

s.6, l.1, *Daughters of . . . Doris*: the Nereids (see Note on Nereus, iv.6).

18. s.5, l.4, *Arcady's God*: Pan.

s.8, l.1, *The woods shall re-echo 'Cynthia'*: cf. the closing lines of 11.19. Did the repetition of the loved one's name operate as a love charm?

19. s.1, l.5, *Not so lightly*, etc.: Cupid here = the spirit of love who enters by the eyes.

s.3, l.2, *Great love leaps over the very shores of death*: probably Propertius's most famous line; in his own words, *Traicit et fati litora magnus amor*. What is its real meaning? The word *litora*, translated 'shores', is sometimes extended to the banks of a river. Was he thinking of the Styx: cf. 11.27? Or was he thinking of lovers on shores separated by the sea—of Hero and Leander, perhaps? It may be he was thinking of all these things. A great poet will sometimes widen the range of his images by setting them a little out of focus.

20. s.1, l.4, *Ascanius*: a river in Bithynia, north of the Black Sea.

s.6, l.1, *Pege*: the source or a feeder of the River Ascanius.

Dryads and Naiads: Strictly speaking, water nymphs are Naiads, Dryads being wood nymphs, but Propertius does not seem to worry about the distinction.

s.7, l.3, *All unknowing, hung over*, etc. The word 'unknowing' (*nescius*) has given rise to some speculation; but surely it means 'not realizing his danger'.

21. There has been endless dispute over this little poem. My understanding of it is that Gallus was married or engaged to the sister of the man he addresses. Both were among the soldiers besieged in Perusia (see pp. 3-4); they escaped separately, in the turmoil of the surrender. Gallus was mortally wounded by a robber in the hills of Tuscany (Etruria); and later the other man came upon him unexpectedly and at first failed to recog-

nize him. The rest appears from the way I have translated the poem. The transmitted text says that Gallus was not to tell his sister what had happened and this is defended by some on the ground that to have escaped from the siege and then been murdered was a disgrace. But why? And surely it was better to tell the sister than leave her in perpetual suspense; and the importance to a Roman of his remains receiving proper rites needs no emphasizing. The text therefore demands emendation. There is no reason to identify the dying man with Propertius's kinsman referred to in 1.22.

22. s.2, l.5, *My kinsman's limbs*, etc.: see p. 4.

Book II

1. After the first two very effective stanzas of this poem, Propertius proceeds to crowd in a mass of historical and mythological allusions that it would take a whole volume to explain. The poem can be understood well enough, however, without such an explanation.

s.1, l.3, *Calliope*: strictly the Muse of heroic poetry, but in Propertius's time poets invoked whichever Muse had a name that suited the line. Calliope was Propertius's favourite: see, e.g. III.3.

s.3, l.1, *Maecénas*: see pp. 5-6 and note on III.9.

s.4, l.10, *The Sacred Way (Via Sacra)*: ancient Rome's principal street. It ran past the Temple of Vesta, the holiest spot in the city, and through the Forum. Triumphal processions followed this route and then up the Capitol to the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, to whom the spoils of victory were offered. And see the penultimate stanza of III.3.

2. Cf. Yeats's poem 'A Thought from Propertius' (*Collected Poems*, 2nd ed., Lon. 1950, p. 172). *Ithaca*: the island kingdom of Ulysses (Odysseus), whom Pallas especially favoured. When Perseus had slain Medusa, the *Gorgon*, he presented her severed head to Pallas. She placed it on her shield, which thus became an efficacious weapon of offence; for the head of a Gorgon, dead or alive, literally petrified all who gazed on it. s.4, *The Goddesses on Ida's heights* were Juno, Minerva and Venus

(Aphrodite). This was the famous beauty contest between the Goddesses of which Paris was the judge. Tennyson's lovely poem 'Oenone' (the name of the nymph Paris deserted for Helen of Troy) is the best account of the judgment. Of course it all led to the Trojan War.

Brimo seems to have been another name of Proserpine (Perséphone). Her affair with Mercury is otherwise unknown. Sometimes, however, she is identified with Hécate.

Bæbéis: a lake in Thessaly, near Mount Ossa where the Centaurs lived.

The Sibyl of Cumae: Apollo granted her a thousand years of life but did not add enduring youth, and so she became very, very old. Tithonus suffered a similar misfortune: see II.18B and Note.

3A. s.3, l.3, *Mountain snows*: Propertius says Maeotic snows, referring for some unknown reason to a region bordering on the Sea of Azov.

Vermilion was made from red lead found in Spain.

s.3, l.13, *Corinna*: a lyric poetess who flourished in Boeotia in the sixth century B.C.; not to be confused with Ovid's mistress. Her work, apart from a few fragments found in Egypt in 1907, has perished.

s.4, l.2, *Cupid's sneeze*: a favourable sign here, though there was a curious lore of sneezes that distinguished between those on the right, which were propitious, and those on the left, which were not.

4. Homosexuality was tolerated if not always approved in the ancient world. Propertius had no interest in it, but some other poets—Tibullus, for instance—adopted it as a theme.

5. s.4, l.1, *Juno's gracious laws*: Juno presided over marriage and punished infidelity. There is no evidence that Propertius and Cynthia were ever married (see pp. 7 ff.) but Propertius often uses the possessive tone of a husband.

6. s.1, *Laïs, Thaïs and Phrynë*: Greek courtesans: see p. 8-9.

7. See pp. 8-10. The last two lines come from the end of II.6 but are more apt here.

8D. *Briseïs* is the girl on whose account Achilles skulked in his tent.

No Goddess for mother: Achilles' mother was the Néréïd Thetis: see Note on iv.6, s.4, l.1.

9B. This fragment refers to the contest between the descendants of Cadmus, King of Thebes: see Note on i.7 on the Theban War.

10. See pp. 13–14 regarding irony; also p. 6.

Helicon: the mountain where the Muses dwelt, often mentioned by Propertius.

s.3, l.1, *The Euphrates* presumably no longer guarded the rear of the Parthians because they had retired to the farther bank.

s.3, l.2, *Crassus* led a Roman army against the Parthians but suffered a disastrous defeat at Carrhae in Northern Mesopotamia in 53 B.C., when he and his son were killed. And see III.4 and Note.

11. Some editors have injudiciously tried to make out that this poem is a fragment of some larger poem; but it is quite complete in itself—in fact, a perfect little gem; it applies to Cynthia the rule that—

Golden lads and girls all must,
As chimney sweepers, come to dust.

13A. The singer whom the oaks and wild beasts followed (see also III.2) was *Orpheus*:

Orpheus with his lute made trees
And the mountain tops that freeze
Bow themselves when he did sing.

13B. s.3, l.2. *A little earthen jar shall receive my spirit:* presumably Propertius means his ashes, in which his spirit might be taken to inhere.

s.3, l.8, *Achilles' grave:* the blood that stained it was that of Polyxena, daughter of Priam, King of Troy. Achilles appeared to the Greeks and demanded her sacrifice. Some have suggested that he loved her and wanted her as his bride in the Underworld; and Propertius may have thought so too. But what Achilles' ghost really wanted was blood. 'According to

primitive ideas blood is life; to receive blood is to receive life; the soul of the dead wants to live and consequently loves blood' (E. Westermarck, *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, 2nd ed., London, 1924, vol. I p. 476). Hence such legends as that of the vampire.

2.5, l.1, *The Three: the Fates (Parcae)*: Clotho, the youngest, who presided at the birth and held the distaff; Láchesis, who spun the thread of life; and Átropos, the eldest, who cut it with her scissors.

14. s.4, *The Queen of Cythéra*: Venus, who rose from the sea, according to one story, close by Cythera, an island between the Peloponnesus and Crete; though the more usual story says it happened near Paphos in Cyprus.

15. s.6, l.4, *Actium*: see p. 2.

16. See Note on 1.8A. Two lines (41-2) that occur in all the MSS. of this poem but are quite irrelevant have been omitted. s.4, l.2, *Hut of thatch*: such a hut, supposed to have been the habitation of Romulus, was preserved on the Capitol.

s.5, l.1, *That savage once jiggled*: a piece of invective, not necessarily literally true, implying that the rival was a freedman who had at one time been exhibited for sale in the slave market. See also iv.5, 5th stanza.

s.6, l.8, *Raised a clamour*: this refers to Antony, whose 'base passion' was for Cleopatra: see pp. 2 and 6.

The Pleiads set in October and *Orión* in November. When they set, stormy weather was to be expected. And see Note on 1.8A.

17. s.2, *Sisyphus* and *Tántalus*, like *Ixíon* and the *Dánaïds*, are types of divine punishment in Hades.

18. A couplet between B and C that has no relevance to either has been omitted.

18B. s.2, l.7, *Tithónus*: see Note on 1.18. Aurora, lovely Goddess of the dawn, loved him and granted him immortality that they might never be parted; but she forgot to add the gift of eternal youth and could not, it seems, afterwards remedy the omission. Consequently he grew older and older, and at last, out of compassion, she turned him into a cicada or grasshopper.

Tennyson's poem, 'Tithonus', wonderfully expresses his grief. No one before Propertius describes how she went on loving him in his old age; this seems a characteristic invention on Propertius's part.

s.3, l.5, *A bent old woman*: some have gratuitously inferred from these words that Cynthia was a lot older than Propertius and perhaps already approaching middle age; but of course Propertius simply means that we all grow old—and sooner than we want to. My translation tries to bring this out.

19. s.2, l.2, *No temples . . . pretexts for sins*: they were, it was alleged, used for assignations.

s.3, l.2, *Diana*: patroness of the hunt: 'Queen and huntress, chaste and fair.'

s.3, l.11, *Snow-white cattle*: a special breed, used for sacrifices.

s.4, l.5, *Repeat your name*: see Note on l.18.

20. s.1, l.5, *The nightingale* is Philoméla weeping for Itys or Itylus, her son: see Swinburne's poem 'Itylus'—one of his very best.

21. In this and the next few poems Propertius assumes a new character: see pp. 17–18. He was as fond of attitudes as Lady Hamilton.

Panthus: a fictitious name.

22A. *Demóphoön*: a Greek, not a Roman name, and clearly fictitious.

s.1, l.9, *With bosom uncovered*, etc. Obviously a 'fast' girl; respectable ladies were expected to take particular care to be well covered in public.

s.2, l.3, *Slash at their arms*, etc.: in the barbarous rites of the Phrygian deities, Cýbele and Attis: see Frazer, *Golden Bough*, 3rd ed., London, 1925, vol. V. (Adonis, Attis, Osiris), pp. 263 ff.

23. s.3, l.1, *With cloak flung back*, etc. No respectable lady would behave like this. The shoes or slippers too, of the kind denoted by the word Propertius uses, were probably brightly coloured and such as street-walkers favoured.

Oróntes: a river in Syria.

24A. *Such talk*, etc.: this must refer back to 23.

24B. *What a girl*, etc.: some contend that this means Cynthia, but this interpretation makes pretty poor sense. It must mean a girl of the class described in 11.23. Anyway Cynthia demanded pearls and purple dresses, not baubles: see 11.16, 3rd stanza.

24C. Propertius now reverts to his normal role of the lover devoted to one girl alone.

s.2, *Lernéan hydras* and *Golden Apples* refer to two of Hercules' labours.

s.3, l.5, *Not ennobled*: for the meaning of 'nobility' see p. 1. The old nobility of the patrician families, though there were still some of them left, was obsolete. After the plebeians secured, about 300 B.C., the passing of a law making it compulsory that one of the two consuls should be a plebeian, the nobility became one of office, whose members constituted an oligarchy that the civil wars undermined and the foundation of the Empire finally destroyed.

25. *Calvus*: orator and poet, and friend of Catullus; all his poems have unfortunately perished.

s.3, l.5, *Rust corrodes*, etc.: this comparison and that of drops wearing out flint may well sound trite today but they were a good deal fresher two thousand years ago: a point to bear in mind in connection with similes and metaphors.

s.7, l.1, *You others who give your devotion*: here Propertius is expressly repudiating the character he temporarily assumed or pretended to assume in 22A.

26A. s.1, l.5, *Helle* gave her name to the Hellespont.

27. s.2, l.5, *Collapse*: There were no building bye-laws in ancient Rome, and builders, especially of tenement houses, were apt to use light timbers. Hence collapse was, it seems, all too common a disaster.

s.2, l.7, *The cup that brings darkness* = poison.

s.3, l.3, *He sits, a rower*: usually Charon the ferryman did the rowing but it seems that the dead had sometimes to take a hand themselves.

28B. *The wheel*, etc.: this was a '*rhombus*', a magical instru-

ment which, when twirled, made a strange sound possibly resembling that of the native Australian 'bull-roarer'.

The moon, etc.: see Note on I.1.

s.1, l.4, *The bird of night*: probably the eagle owl (*bubo*) whose cry was thought to portend death:

Hark! the death owl loud doth sing
To the nightmares as they go.

31. s.3, l.2, *The Pythian God*: Apollo; from Pytho, the old name for Delphi, where Apollo's famous oracle was situated.

s.3, l.6, *Myron*: a famous Greek sculptor, fl. c. 440 B.C. The very well known 'Discobolus' is attributed to him; and passing bulls were said to halt in their tracks when they caught sight of his cow that stood in the market place at Athens. Presumably Augustus transported from Greece the cows for Apollo's new temple.

32. s.2, l.4, *Maro's statue* was evidently a celebrated sight.

s.3, l.4, *Aricia's grove*: near Aricia (now Riccia), by the Lake of Nemi, was a grove sacred to Diana: see the first chapter of Frazer's *Golden Bough*, and Macaulay's *Lays*:

Those trees in whose dim shadow
The ghastly priest did reign,
The priest who slew the slayer
And shall himself be slain.

He gained his office of King of the Wood by killing his predecessor and held it until a would-be successor killed him—a strange, barbarous survival from the past.

s.3, l.5, *The Goddess of Crossroads*—Diana (Trivia): see Note on I.1.

33A. s.1, l.4, *Isis*: formerly Io: see Note on I.3. Her cult required women devotees to refrain on occasions from sexual intercourse; hence Propertius's dislike of it.

s.1, l.6, *Whatever her name may be*: she was, apart from being Io and Isis, invoked as 'O thou of countless names' (*Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 1949, s. v. 'Isis').

33B. *The Ploughman* (or 'Waggoner' or 'Bear-ward'): the constellation of Boötes, with Arcturus, its principal star, that nightly drives across the sky the 'Plough' (the constellation

also called the 'Wain' or 'Great Bear') drawn by its slow team of oxen.

s.2, l.3, *Icarus*: usually spelt *Icarius* and not to be confused with the *Icarus* who flew too near the sun.

s.3, l.7, *Falernian*: a fine rich wine from Campania.

34A & B. *Lynceus*: a Greek name, fictitious like *Demophoön* in II.22A. The professed philosopher and moralist to whom it is applied here may very well, of course, be a real man.

34B. s.1, *Callimachus* and *Philétas* (or *Philítas*): see p. 32. *Callimachus*' 'Dreams' is his best known poem.

s.3, l.1, *Lofty poems buskin shod*: the buskin (*cothurnus*) was a long boot worn by tragic actors; those in comedy wore the 'sock' (*soccus*), a light shoe.

s.3, l.5, *Antimachus*: a Greek poet of the fifth century B.C. who wrote epic and other poems. Only a few inconsiderable fragments survive.

34C. *Vergil* (his true name was *Vergilius* but an *i* tended to replace the *e* even in his own lifetime; and the anglicized form is often spelt *Virgil*): before writing the *Aeneid*, he wrote his *Eclogues*, pastoral poems about shepherds and their loves and sorrows; and his *Georgics*, agricultural poems after the manner of the *Works and Days* of the eighth century B.C. Greek poet *Hesiod*—but much better.

Book III

1. s.3, l.6, *Overbearing chaplet*: he means as a reward for an epic poem—too heavy for him.

s.5, l.9, *The God of Oeta* is *Hercules*; it was on Mount *Oeta* that his life as a mortal ended. He captured *Troy* because *Laóme-don*, one of its early kings, refused him the promised reward for destroying a sea-monster. Later, at the siege of *Troy* by the Greeks, it was with his bow that *Philoctétes* killed *Paris*, whose death was a fated pre-condition of *Troy's* fall.

2. s.2, l.4, *Stones that formed*, etc.: the story is that the stones for the walls of *Thebes* travelled all the way from Mount

Citháeron and sprang into place just at the sound of Amphíon's lyre.

s.3, l.4, *Elaborate grotto an aqueduct serves*: The Aqua Marcia, ancient Rome's principal aqueduct, was available to feed artificial grottoes, pools and fountains for those wealthy enough to afford such luxuries. The theme—that everything perishes except the written word—is a commonplace but Propertius treats it very effectively. For poems on the same theme see Horace, *Odes*, III.30; and Shakespeare, *Sonnets* 64 and 65.

3. This poem, like several others (e.g. II.1 & 10), is a *recusatio*, a poem in which the poet, having been urged to write an epic, excuses himself, usually in very complimentary terms, on the ground of his incapacity.

s.1, l.2, *The stream that flowed*, etc.: Híppocréne (the final e is silent in the anglicized form).

s.1, l.6, *Ennius* (239–169 B.C.) was the father of Roman poetry. He wrote epic poems on Rome's history, including the Second Punic War against Hannibal and his Carthaginians. Unhappily only fragments of his poems survive.

s.1, l.11, *Larēs* (2 syllables): Gods of the home and family. They were very ancient and opinions differ about their original character. The Lares of the City of Rome were her guardians and had a temple in the Sacred Way.

s.4, l.3, *Snow white swans* drew Venus's chariot.

4. The Parthian expedition was to have vindicated Roman arms from the disgrace of Carrhae: see Note on II.10. Actually, however, Augustus reached a peaceful accord and there was no fighting. Propertius begins the poem in a high-flying strain but, in the final stanza, shows that he was only pretending: see p. 6.

s.3, l.6, *Titles of . . . cities*: pictures of the cities would be displayed in the triumphal procession.

s.4, l.2, *Stock of Aenéas*: the Caesars: see p. 6.

5. s.1, l.3, *My spirit is not spurred on*, etc. Propertius implies that soldiers went to war primarily for booty: see also III.12, where he calls soldiers 'hunters of booty'.

s.1, l.6, *Bronzes . . . from wretched Corinth*: Corinth was burnt by Lucius Mummius, 146 B.C., and refounded by Julius Caesar, 44 B.C. Corinthian bronze was an alloy of great beauty, it is said of gold, silver and bronze, alleged to have resulted from the fusion of objects made of these metals when the city was burnt.

s.3, l.6, *Death comes best*, etc.: don't hasten it by going to war.

s.5, l.6, *The bow of bright colours*, etc.: it was an ancient belief that the rainbow absorbed the rain.

6. The screech-owl (*strix*) was supposed to have vampirish propensities.

Lygdamus seems here to be Cynthia's slave; in iv. 7 & 8 he is Propertius's. Perhaps Propertius lent him to Cynthia or perhaps they shared him. There was a minor elegiac poet of this name in the literary circle of Messalla (see p. 33); and it would be pleasant to think he was Propertius's Lygdamus, who had been granted his freedom. It is true that in iv.7 Cynthia accuses Lygdamus the slave of poisoning her, but Propertius does not seem to take the accusation seriously. Anyway, the identification is no more than a wild conjecture.

7. Four lines (21-24) have been omitted from this poem; they make no sense in their context or, indeed, very much sense at all, and if Propertius wrote them they must have crept in from some unknown place in another poem. The sequence of thoughts in the whole poem is notoriously confused and editors have proposed various elaborate schemes of transposition of couplets. None, however, produces any worth-while improvement.

8B. *May your parents at law*, etc.: rather obscure; but presumably his wife's parents would keep a close watch on him and upbraid him for any suspected infidelities to their daughter.

9. This poem is another *recusatio*: see Note on III.3.

Maecénas: see pp. 5-6.

Do not aspire, etc.: though of renowned descent Maecénas was of equestrian status (see pp. 1-2); but, had he wanted it, his importance and his services to Augustus entitled him to the highest rank. As mentioned in the third stanza, he could have

been consul, when his attendants (*lictors*) would have carried the *fasces*, bundles consisting of an axe and rods, the insignia of the consulship; or praetor, when he would have administered justice.

10. See p. 18.

11. See p. 6. This poem does, however, seem to show a genuine gratitude to Augustus for delivering Rome from the sinister menace of Egypt.

s.3, 1.3, *He whose pillars*, etc.: Hercules.

s.4, 1.3, *Why mention her*, etc.: Cleopatra.

s.4, 1.9, *Pompey* was treacherously murdered when he landed in Egypt to find refuge after his defeat by Julius Caesar at Pharsalus.

s.4, 1.12, *Father-in-law*, etc.: Julius Caesar, whose seventeen-year-old daughter, Julia, Pompey married in 59 B.C. He was thirty years older and he married her for political reasons; but she was a delightful girl and he was soon as completely devoted to her as was her father. She held the two men together while she lived, but unhappily, in 54 B.C., she died in childbirth.

s.8, 1.6, *One whose name of Raven*, etc.: Marcus Valerius, a hero of old, was engaged in single combat, as champion of Rome, with a mighty giant, champion of the Gauls. A raven flew in the giant's face and helped our hero to win the fight. For this he was given the surname of Corvinus, from *corvus*, a raven.

12. See p. 6. *Postumus* is probably Gaius Propertius Postumus, a relative of Propertius's, a senator and proconsul. His wife Galla is called Aelia Galla in a later line (though the reading is uncertain), which has given rise to the suggestion that she was the sister of Aelius Gallus, the successor of Cornelius Gallus the poet (p. 33) as Prefect of Egypt. It is then suggested that Aelius Gallus was the Gallus to whom Propertius addressed several poems (see Note on 1.5). That Gallus, however, was 'noble', whereas Aelius Gallus was an 'eques' (see pp. 1-2).

s.2, 1.2, *Araxes*: a river in Armenia flowing into the Caspian.

13. s.1, 1.5 *The Indian ant*: it was believed, somewhat naïvely, that in India ants mined gold and brought it up to the surface

in the winter; then, when the ants retired underground to escape the heat of summer, the Indians stole their gold.

s.2, l.1, *Husbands in Eastern lands*, etc.: this refers to the horrible custom of suttee. The self-immolation of widows has at certain periods been approved or even demanded in many parts of the world.

s.7, l.4, *Cassandra* was a daughter of Priam, King of Troy. She was not just the prophetess of woe that some people seem to take her for nowadays. The real story is that her beauty so fired the all-too-susceptible Apollo that, when she proved unresponsive, he promised her the gift of prophecy if only she would let him have his will. Unwisely he made her his gift in advance, whereupon she refused to keep her part of the bargain. He could not resume his gift, for even a God cannot do that, so to punish her he ordained that, though her prophecies would be true, no one should believe them. She prophesied the fall of Troy and how it would be brought about, but no one took any notice.

15. s.4, l.1, *Her tears left Zethus unmoved*, etc.: he and his brother did not know who Antiope was because they had been wickedly exposed as infants. A shepherd had rescued them—the ‘old guardian’ who now told them Antiope was their mother.

16. s.5, l.7, *The press of the highway*: when the pyre was burnt out the ashes of the dead of better-off families were cooled with wine and then gathered up and placed in an urn. This was then deposited in the family tomb, which was sometimes in a garden, but many such tombs lined the highways outside the city. Cynthia’s ashes were deposited in a tomb beside the highway (see iv.7), which, incidentally, confirms the status of her family (see p. 8). For himself Propertius wanted a quieter resting place.

17. This hymn to Bacchus, asking the God to grant respite from the pangs of unrequited love, alludes to some of the many stories about him, but his legend is full of detail and there is no space to expound it here.

s.2, l.7, *Horns of strength*: horns are an emblem of power. Propertius no doubt also remembered that Bacchus is sometimes represented with horns.

In the third stanza Propertius is not so much describing Bacchus as saying how he means to describe him in the further poems he promised to write. He is setting up a tableau—and a splendid one.

18. *Marcellus*: Marcus Claudius Marcellus, son of Augustus's sister Octavia; Augustus adopted him and married him to his daughter Julia. He was all set for a great future when, in 23 B.C., he died in his twentieth year. Propertius, rather oddly, does not name him in the poem; but there is no doubt about who is meant.

Shady Avernus: a large lake near Baiae (see Note on 1.11) formerly shaded by trees. Augustus constructed canals joining it to the Lucrine Lake and the Lucrine to the sea, erecting a breakwater to prevent the sea washing over the causeway.

s.1, 1.9, *Plunged his face in the Stygian waves*: this is purely metaphorical. He was not drowned.

s1., 1.10, *On your lake*: possibly Avernus; more probably the Lucrine.

s.3, 1.3, *Caesar* means Julius Caesar. As he had adopted Octavian (Augustus) and Augustus had adopted Marcellus he had in effect become Marcellus's grandfather. His spirit was supposed to have ascended to heaven as a comet.

s.5, 1.3, *Claudius*: Marcus Claudius Marcellus, an ancestor of the dead Marcellus, which is why Propertius brings him in, and a great warrior. And see Note on IV.10, s.6, 1.10.

20A. *Setting sail*: is this a metaphor or does it mean to Illyria? Is the rival the one who is referred to in 1.8 and II.16? If so, Propertius seems now to be rid of him.

Dreaming of Gods, etc.: those by whom the deserter had sworn to be faithful.

20B. It is generally assumed by commentators that this poem, which uses language properly applicable to a projected wedding, really anticipates a first night with a new mistress—perhaps the woman referred to in 20A. This seems implausible. Surely Propertius must be talking about a wedding in the true sense but no doubt an imaginary one. The assumption that the poem must be autobiographical is unwarranted. Of

course there is no evidence that Propertius and Cynthia were ever married.

21. Whether Propertius ever went to Athens is unknown; it may have been only a passing idea.

22. s.1, l.2, *Tullus*: see Note on 1.1.

s.2, l.1, *Atlas*, etc.: all the legends alluded to in this stanza are of happenings in the Near East, mostly in the region of Cyzicus, which lies on the southerly shore of the Sea of Azov.

24. s.3, l.1, *Father's friends*: Propertius's father was dead; he means the friends of the family.

s.3, l.3, *The knife and the cautery*: note the similar wording in the penultimate stanza of 1.1.

25. s.3, l.3, *Though you hide the years*: see p. 18.

Book IV

1A. *Trojan Aenéas*: for this and further references to Troy in this poem, see Vergil's *Aeneid*, which tells the whole story.

Ship-ruling Phoebus: so called because he was supposed to have aided Octavian against Antony in the sea battle off Actium, where his temple stood. (See p. 2 and iv.6.)

s.1, l.11, *Purple-hemmed robes*: the togas of senators had a purple border.

s.2, l.3, *Exotic Gods*: see p. 22.

s.2, l.13, *Lupercal*: an ancient festival in the course of which naked young men, originally herdsmen, ran a race, carrying goatskin thongs, the touch of which was supposed to cure barrenness in women. See Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Act I, Scene II:

Forget not in your speed, Antonius,
To touch Calpurnia; for our elders say
The barren, touched in this holy chase,
Shake off their sterile curse.

s.3, l.3, *Lycmon*: general of the Etruscans, who helped Romulus against Tatius, King of the Sabines, after which the three of them made a treaty. And see last stanza of iv.2.

s.4, l.7, *Decius* = Decius Mus, two similarly named heroes, father and son, of ancient days.

s.4, l.8, *Brutus* = Lucius Junius Brutus; not his distant descendant, Marcus Junius Brutus, Caesar's assassin, but a hero of old. According to the story he drove out the wicked king, Tarquin the Proud, and became one of Rome's two first consuls.

s.4, l.12, *Remus's death would avert*, etc. See also III.9, penultimate stanza. The notion that Remus's death, which arose out of his quarrel with his brother Romulus over the founding of Rome, was a foundation sacrifice seems to be found only in Propertius but must have been current; though Horace, on the contrary, says that Remus's murder imposed a curse on Rome (see *Epodes*, VII). Foundation and building sacrifices have been common enough: see E. Westermarck, *The Origin & Development of the Moral Ideas*, 2nd ed. (London, 1926), Vol. I, pp. 461 ff. They are generally considered to have been vicarious sacrifices of one for all to satisfy malevolent Gods or spirits, always in a bad mood if one is doing something new or unaccustomed; but some anthropologists have taken the view that the ghost of the victim is supposed to assume the role of a spiritual watchdog.

s.5, l.11, *The towering height of Asis* (and see also IV.1B, 6th stanza) seems to have been a steep hill with perhaps a fortress on the summit, rather than a town to be identified with Assisi.

1B. s.2, l.3, *Horos* the soothsayer is no doubt a fictitious character. *Orops of Babylon* (the home of astrology) is unknown, but *Archytas* and *Conon* were real men.

s.3, l.1, *Arria* and her sons are unknown; probably Propertius invented them.

s.3, l.5, *Lupercus*: most editors and commentators do not find it plausible that a rider should try to protect his horse, though this is what the transmitted texts all say; they therefore arbitrarily amend the text to accord with their own ideas.

s.4, l.2, *Cínara* is probably Propertius's invention; but *Calchas*, and the advice he gave to Agamemnon, are part of the famous legend of Troy. He was, *Horos* implies, an unwise prophet for failing to foresee the evils that would befall the Greeks if they sailed from Aulis to Troy.

s.6, l.5, *Mevánia* is the modern Bevagna. The *Umbrian Lake* has disappeared; it was drained long ago.

s.7, l.2, *Straitened hearth and home*: see p. 2-3.

s.9, l.5, *Sinister eight-footed crab*: presumably the Crab (*Cancer*) of the Zodiac. Propertius for some reason thought it was unpropitious.

2. *Vertumnus*: an ancient God, originally Etruscan (Tuscan), of whom almost nothing is known beyond what Propertius tells us here. The Romans connected his name with the verb *verto*, to turn, but this is questionable. His statue stood in the Tuscan Road (*Vicus Tuscus*) where it joined the Forum.

s.1, l.4, *Volstini*: an ancient town in Etruria (Tuscany).

s.1, l. 11, *Turning river* = *Vert-amnis* from *verto*, to turn, and *amnis*, river; and 'turning-year' = *Vert-annus*, from *annus*, year. Both derivations are false; quaint and groundless etymologies are not peculiar to the ancient Romans. Of course the play on these words cannot be rendered in English.

s.6, l.3, *Numa* = Numa Pompilius, the second of Rome's legendary kings.

s.6, l.5, *Mamúrius* was a clever craftsman he employed.

3. *Arethusa* and *Lycótas* are Greek names but may be pseudonyms for real persons Propertius knew: cf. II.21 and 22A.

s.2, l.2, *Seric* should mean Chinese; but though Chinese silk reached Rome, there was no contact, and certainly no war, between Rome and China. The Chinese (*Seres*), like the *Getans* and *Indians*, stood for the potentially dangerous peoples beyond the Eastern frontier of the Empire. If *Arethusa* studied the map (see 4th stanza) there is no reason to think that Propertius did so too.

s.2, l.7 ff., *The ominous torch, the lustral water* and the *chaplet* (properly a kind of head-band) refer to features of the Roman marriage ceremony.

s.2, l.10, *The God of Marriage* = Hymen.

s.3, l.1, *On every gate*: no doubt she hoped *Lycótas* would be returning by one or other of them; 'unhappy vows' because he had so far not done so.

s.3, l.5, *Ocnus* was a figure in a famous painting of the Underworld. He worked very hard but let his wife spend all he

earned, and his sentence was to sit plaiting a rope that a donkey, whose activities, as he sat sideways, he could not see, ate as fast as he made it. He was thus the proverbial man who worked to no valid purpose. So did the inventor of instruments of war.

s.3, l.10, *Love-bites*: something, it seems, expected of Roman lovers; and see III.8A, 3rd stanza, and IV.5, 4th stanza.

s.6, l.5, *Craugis, my little dog*: the late Professor H. W. Garrod, in his charming book of essays *Genius Loci* (Oxford, 1950, p. 55), says that 'Latin is a dogless literature', containing only two dogs of consequence: Pearl, whose touching epitaph he introduced into his *Oxford Book of Latin Verse*, and Issa, so delightfully described by Martial, that always asked to be lifted off the coverlet and never left a drop behind. Craugis (probably meaning Yap) makes a third. I suspect the Romans were not so dogless as the Professor alleged.

s.6, l.9, *Night-owl*: this is not *bubo*, the baleful eagle owl (see note on II. 28B) or *strix*, the screech owl accused of sucking children's blood (see note on III.6) but *noctua*, the owl, sacred to Minerva, that we usually call the little owl. Its cry seems to have had no funereal associations but to have portended a change in the weather—here, no doubt, a change favouring Lycotas' return.

s.6, l.10, *Flickering lamp*: the reason for the wine is uncertain as is the portent; probably, however, it meant that Lycotas would be arriving. Hence the need for a sacrificial offering to the Gods to speed his safe coming.

s.7, l.4, *Cunning horsemen*: the Parthian cavalry was notorious for feigning flight and then suddenly turning to shoot arrows at the pursuers.

s.7, l.5, *Spear-shaft*: a headless spear (*hasta pura*) customarily awarded as a prize for bravery and carried in the triumphal procession.

s.7, l.9, *Capene Gate (Porta Capéna)*: the one by which Lycotas would enter the City if he came from the East.

4. The transmitted text of this poem is full of corruptions, which editors have vigorously and variously emended. I have done my best to find a way through the thicket. The poem

purports to be aetiological, designed to explain the origin of the name 'Tarpeian Hill', anciently applied either to the whole Capitoline Hill, sacred to Jupiter, or else to the particular summit known in history as the Tarpeian Rock. What Propertius in fact does, however, is to tell the tale of Tarpeia's treachery. Her motive, according to the usual account, was greed for gold; but Propertius's version, which he may well have invented, makes her act from love of Tatius, the Sabine king (see note on IV.1A, s.v. 'Lycmon').

s.3, l.1, *The Goddess she served*: she was a Vestal Virgin, one of the priestesses of the Goddess Vesta, whose principal duty was to ensure that the sacred fire did not go out.

s.4, l.2, *Bathe her hair*, etc.: presumably as a purification to avert the evil effects of the unpropitious omens, whatever they may have been, that she pretended to have seen. Really she wanted to catch another glimpse of Tatius.

s.4, l.5, *The first fires smoked*: commentators are not agreed whether this means morning or evening. If it was evening, and she climbed the hill after having gone to the spring in the hope of seeing Tatius from there, she must have sat on the hill until sunrise.

s.5, l.15, *Palladian fire*: In Vesta's temple stood an image of Minerva (Pallas Athene) supposed to be the Palladium.

s.6, l.5, *Muse of Magic*: an allusion to the means by which Medéa was able to help Jason.

s.7, l.4, *The Rape of the Sabines* is a phrase apt to be misunderstood. The Sabine women were not raped in the sense in which the term is known to the criminal law; they were abducted. Livy tells the story in his inimitably vivid style in Book I of his great but, alas, time-ravaged history. Romulus, after founding Rome, attracted a number of men to live in it but there was a desperate shortage of women to build future generations. He therefore formed the plan of holding an athletic contest and inviting the neighbouring Sabines; then, at a given signal, each of the Roman young men seized a Sabine girl and carried her off to be his bride. Romulus succeeded, temporarily at least, in appeasing the parents by satisfying them of the strictly honourable intentions of the Romans, who in their turn appeased the girls by satisfying them of their true

love. When, at a later date, the Romans and the Sabines went to war, these same girls, now Roman wives, stopped the battle by thrusting themselves and their children between the fighting men.

5. The text of this poem, like that of iv.4, contains a number of corruptions not easy to resolve. Some commentators have suggested that the poem is autobiographical, but for this there is no justification. The procuress against whom it inveighs is not an individual but a type portrayed in Greek and Roman literature long before Propertius. Both Ovid and Tibullus wrote poems in a similar strain.

s.2, l.4, *Antinoüs*: Penelope's principal suitor during Ulysses' absence.

s.2, l.6, *Act like a stepmother*, etc.: at Rome stepmothers were proverbial for ill-treating their stepchildren. But see iv.11, penultimate stanza.

s.2, l.7, *Over a trench*, etc.: this is all very obscure and the usual interpretations have little meaning. Supposing Mr Camp's suggestion of 'standing crops' (*stantia*) is right, then presumably a magical trench, filled with water, operated by sympathetic magic to raise a flood.

s.2, l.9, *Bewitched the moon*: see Note on i.1.

s.2, l.12, *Eyes of poor crows*: the blinding of the crows would operate by sympathetic magic to prevent jealous husbands from seeing how their wives were deceiving them.

s.2, l.13, *Vampire-owls*: the screech-owls referred to in the Note on iv.3. According to other accounts they sucked the blood of infants, but they may well not have been averse to that of adults.

s.2, l.14, *Effusion of pregnant mares*: the *hippómanes*, described in a passage of Vergil (*Georgics* IV, 280-4) as a poison though said elsewhere to act as a love potion.

s.3, l.4, *Purple the shell fish flaunt*, etc.: these were shell fish of several species from which the famous Tyrian purple was obtained, the dye used, in varying shades, for luxurious garments and furnishings and for the imperial robes.

s.3, l.8, *Murrine wine-cups*: *Murra* is usually said to be a mineral like fluorspar or jade, but if it was fired was it not a ceramic

substance? Or did the heating deepen the colour? No one knows; but it was highly valued.

s.4, l.6, *Isis makes you abstain*, etc., see Note on II.33A.

Love-bites: see Note on IV.3.

s.5, l.7, *One from whose barbarous neck*, etc., see Note on II.16.

The feet of slaves offered for public sale were whitened.

s.5, l.15, *Roses of fragrant Paestum*: a town in Lucania famous for its rose-gardens. Some have rejected these lines as too beautiful (in the original) for a cynical old bawd; but surely even bawds have their moments.

s.6, l.2, *A ring-dove*: Venus's own bird.

6. See pp. 2 and 6. This poem seems to have been written for the quinquennial festivities established in honour of the victory of Augustus at Actium, and first celebrated in 28 B.C. The temple of Phoebus Apollo on the Actian promontory was regarded as a thank-offering for this victory though actually built earlier.

Poet-priest: the Latin word *vates* that Propertius uses means both seer and poet. It was a convention among Roman poets to represent themselves as priests of Apollo and the Muses. Although by Propertius's time it was no more than a convention, it had its roots in reality; the first poems were magical spells.

For *Philétas* and *Callimachus* see p. 32.

s.1, l.5, *Thrice wreathed*, etc., three was the sacred number.

s.1, l.6, *The new-raised altar*: of fresh-cut turf.

s.1, l.8, *Phrygian music*: the pipe, which accompanied parts of most religious ceremonies, was especially associated with the Phrygian Goddess, Cybele.

s.1, l.11, *Novel road*: because a poet would be expected to treat a heroic theme in hexameters, not elegiacs.

s.2, l.1, *Calliope*: Propertius's favourite Muse: see Note on II.1.

s.2, l.2, *Palatine Phoebus*: so called because of his new temple on the Palatine Hill: see II.31.

s.2, l.3, *Caesar* = Augustus.

s.4, l.1, *Nereus*: as though the God were present disposing the battle lines. His daughters, by his wife Doris, were the Nereids,

the Nymphs invoked in the concluding lines of 1.17. There were no less than fifty of them, some say even a hundred; but of course the immortal Gods had all the time in the world. Only two, Thetis, the mother of Achilles, and Galatée, achieved individual fame.

s.4, 1.10, *Emptied the Grecian camp*, etc.: by means of a plague. The Greeks had carried off the daughter of Chryses, Apollo's priest.

s.4, 1.11. *Python*: the great snake that guarded the oracle of Delphi before Apollo went there. As Postgate says, this passage (in the original) 'realizes the peculiar horror of the serpent's movements, the slow sinuous progress through all its length . . . We can almost see it.'

s.7, 1.5, *Caesar, Augustus' sire* means Julius Caesar (though elsewhere Caesar almost always means Augustus). Julius adopted Augustus (then Octavian) as his son. He was deified after his death; for his 'star' (more accurately a comet) see Note on III.18.

s.9, 1.1, *Sycambri*: a German tribe. They gave hostages but it was a gross exaggeration to call them 'slaves'.

s.9, 1.2, *Cepheus' realm* = Ethiopia; hence 'dusky'.

s.9, 1.3, *Parthians*: see III.4 and Note thereon.

s.9, 1.7, *Crassus*: see Note on II.10.

s.9, 1.7, *Sandy darkness*: Propertius says, literally, 'the black sands'. There has been much debate about this, some contending that Propertius thought the sands of Parthia were burnt black by the sun (commentators seldom credit him with much sense) and others that he was referring to the dark skins of the natives. But Crassus was dead and he or his ashes buried in the sand; hence, fairly obviously, the blackness or darkness.

7. s.2, 1.2, *By the highway's murmur*: see Note on III.16. 'Murmur' is the Latin word Propertius himself uses, often translated by 'roar' or some other word implying a loud noise. But Propertius is thinking of Cynthia *inside* the tomb. In 1.8A, 1st stanza, I have translated 'murmur' as 'muffled roar' — the noise of the sea heard inside the ship. Similarly in other contexts.

s.3, 1.4, *Lethe*, one of the five rivers of Hades, wiped out the past.

s.4, 1.3, *The haunts where no one sleeps*: the Subúra, a street of

equivocal repute between the Viminal and Quirinal Hills, where everyone minded everyone else's business.

s.6, l.3, *As far as the gates*: i.e. the gates of the city. Cremation and burial of the ashes had to take place outside the city, no doubt less from hygienic than superstitious motives—to escape the pollution of death.

s.7, l.1, *Lýgdamus*: see Note on m.6. Clearly Cynthia thought he and Nomas had poisoned her: a strange story. Did Propertius believe she had been poisoned? As Gilbert Highet says, the poem 'contains as much material as would make a striking novel'. Why has no one written it?

s.7, l.4, *The fiery shard*, etc.: sounds like ordeal by fire but no such procedure is otherwise recorded for Rome. Probably it means no more than that torture will make her confess.

s.10, l.4, *The wooden monster*: the hollow wooden image of a bull in which Pasíphaë, wife of Minos, King of Crete, conceived the Minotaur.

s.12, l.5, *Latris* is Greek for maidservant.

s.13, l.1, *Repel from my tomb the ivy*, etc.: the texts say *pelle* meaning 'drive away' or 'repel'; but ivy was Bacchus's plant and the proper material for a poet's wreath: see, e.g. II.5, 3rd stanza, II.30B, last stanza, and IV.1A, last stanza. Some editors have therefore amended *pelle* to *pone*, 'place' or 'plant', thinking that Cynthia would have wanted ivy. But she may well have had her own reasons for disliking it; after all, a wreath of ivy is one thing, ivy tendrils involving one's bones quite another, especially when hers and Propertius's were to mingle.

s.14, l.2, *The Gate of the Blest*: there is an old story of two gates, one of horn for true dreams and the other of ivory for false ones. But was Propertius dreaming? He says at the beginning of the poem that 'sleep hung back from me'. The whole conception is his own.

s.15, l.2, *Our bones I'll crumble*: see p. 13.

8. Two lines (19 & 20 in the MSS.) have been omitted from this poem. Attempts have been made to save them by transposition, but in the new position proposed for them they present several insoluble incongruities.

Watery Esquiline: Propertius lived on the Esquiline Hill: see end of III.23. It is probably called 'watery' because of fountains or aqueducts there.

s.2, l.1, *Lanuvium*: a town about fifteen miles south-east of Rome on the Appian Way. It was famous for its shrine of Juno as well as for its sacred snake. Such snakes are not uncommon. Besides being associated with the dead and the Underworld, the result of their habit of lurking in crevices and holes in the ground and perhaps in cracks in tombs, they had, as at Lanuvium, a phallic significance.

s.3, l.8, *Molossian hounds*: large dogs from Epirus. No doubt they kept pace with the carriage as Dalmatians used to do in England.

s.3, l.10, *Hire out his life*, etc.: having run through his fortune, he would have to sell himself to a gladiatorial school, where the pay was good and the food rough but wholesome: not so uncommon an end for young profligates, but here introduced as a piece of invective. Propertius was jealous.

s.5, l.4, *Wine that tasted of Greece*: the Roman attitude to the Greeks was ambivalent: on the one hand they despised them as decadents, as by that time some of them were; on the other hand they genuinely admired their culture and learning.

s.5, l.7, *Magnus*: just the name for a dwarf, though some editors have wanted to substitute the word *nanus*, which is Latin for dwarf, whereby the whole point is lost.

s.5, l. 9, *The lamps would only flicker*, etc.: this, the collapsing table, and the unhappy dice-throws, were all inauspicious omens.

s.7, l.7, *Guardian spirit*: everyone was thought to have one. A man's was called his '*genius*'; a woman's her '*juno*'.

s.8, l.6, *The licentious Forum*: gladiatorial contests were sometimes held in the Forum and then it was sanded.

s.8, l.7, *Gaze up at the women's seats*: the women sat separately in the upper part of the theatre.

s.8, l.8, *Uncurtained litter*: the more respectable ladies kept the curtains of their litters drawn.

s.8, l.9, *Lýgdamus must go for sale*: but he was still with Propertius after Cynthia's death. If she had any real grounds for

suspecting him of poisoning her, what a pity Propertius did not sell him as she had ordered: see iv.7, s.7.

9. *Son of Amphitryon*: Hercules was actually the son of Jupiter by Alcmena. Jupiter, however, seduced her by disguising himself as Amphitryon, her future husband.

Erythéan byre: the cattle had belonged to Géryon, a horrible giant who ruled in Erythéa, an island in the Bay of Cades, and whom Hercules, for his tenth labour, had destroyed. Like Cacus, and Cerberus, the dog of Hades, he had three heads.

s.1, 1.5, *Velábrum*: a low-lying area between the Capitol and the Palatine.

s.2, 1.2, *Dishonoured Jove*: because the God was patron of hospitality. Cacus, however, was Hercules's host only in the sense that Hercules was a sojourner in his territory.

s.2, 1.7, *The God was witness*: not Hercules, as some have supposed. Cacus would have made sure that Hercules was not looking; and if he had seen the theft, what need for the cattle to low and so reveal their whereabouts? The God was Jupiter and it was he who caused the cattle to low.

s.2, 1.9, *Relentless doors*: through which he dragged the human victims he was going to devour.

s.4, 1.6, *Goddess of Women*: the Bona Dea, an ancient Roman deity of whom little is known.

s.5, 1.7, *Bore the sky on his back*: this was the task of Atlas, but Hercules temporarily relieved him while Atlas went to fetch for him the apples of the Hesperides, his eleventh labour.

s.5, 1.11, *The Stygian gloom*, etc.: Hercules's twelfth and final labour was to go down to Hades and fetch Cerberus, the three-headed watch dog. The gloom 'shone bright' for him because he escaped back into the light of day.

s.6, 1.1, *Vengeful Juno*: she hated and persecuted Hercules because of her husband Jupiter's intrigue with Alcmena, Hercules' mother. Stepmothers were proverbially unkind: see Note on iv.5.

s.6, 1.5, *Menial work*, etc.: Hercules was for a time the slave of Omphale, Queen of Lydia. She dressed herself in his accoutrements and made him dress and work as a woman.

s.7, 1.3, *Spare your eyes*: lest Hercules should, like Peeping Tom, go blind, as did Tirésias, who, however, was consoled by the gift of prophecy.

s.7, 1.8, *Gorgon shield*: see Note on II.2, s.v. 'Ithaca'.

s.9, 1.1, *Purged and sanctified the world*: by ridding it of the various giants and monsters that infested it.

s.9, 1.2, *Sancus*: a name used in the cult of Hercules and no doubt understood to mean 'Sanctifier'.

10. Spoils, consisting of arms and armour, which the commander of one army won from the commander of another in personal combat, were called by the Romans *spolia opima* (rich spoil); the victor dedicated them to Jupiter Feretrius at his temple on the Capitol: see especially R. M. Ogilvie, *Commentary on Livy Books I-V* (Oxford, 1965), pp. 70-3. The origin of the surname Feretrius is uncertain. Propertius says it came either from *ferio*, to strike, alluding to the fallen enemy, or *ferro*, to carry, alluding to the victor's duty to carry the spoil to the temple for dedication.

s.2, 1.3, *Acron*, King of Caenina, was a Sabine leader. He attacked Rome on account of the Rape of the Sabine Women (see Note on IV.4) but was too precipitate, not waiting for the arrival of his allies; thus disaster overtook him.

s.3, 1.8, *Nomentum* lay about fifteen miles north-east of Rome, *Cora* some twenty miles south-east.

s.4, 1.1, *Cossus*: Aulus Cornelius Cossus, consul 428 B.C.

s.4, 1.2, *Veii*: an Etruscan city, a persistent enemy of Rome in early days, captured and razed by the great Camillus in the fourth century B.C.

s.6, 1.1, *Claudius*: Marcus Claudius Marcellus, consul 222 B.C., a famous soldier. He is the Claudius mentioned at the end of Propertius's Lament for Marcellus (III.18). The victory referred to here was against the Insubres, a Gaulish tribe. And see Note on III.18.

s.6, 1.5, *Clothed in striped breeches*: breeches (*bracae*) were the characteristic dress of the Gauls. The Greeks and Romans considered them suitable only for barbarians.

s.7, 1.1, *Three spoils*, etc.: the play on the words Feretrius, *ferio* (to strike) and *ferro* (to carry) cannot be reproduced in English.

11. See p. 19. Unfortunately the last sheet, on which most of this poem was written, of the one reliable MS. of Propertius's poems, is missing: and the other MSS. present a number of problems for which there is never a certain and seldom even a probable solution. Even so it remains a great poem whose solemn splendours no translation can adequately convey. It is notable that Propertius's notions of life after death, like those of many others before and since, are wrapped in a haze of vagueness.

Paullus: Lucius Aemilius Paullus Lepidus, a fairly successful statesman under Augustus.

s.1, 1.5, *The God of the Hall of Darkness* = Pluto.

s.1, 1.7, *When the Stygian ferryman is paid*: he required a fee for ferrying the dead across the Styx and it was therefore the custom to place a small coin under the corpse's tongue.

s.2, 1.5, *The darkness of doom* = the Underworld; a watery place washed by five rivers—Lethe, Cocýtus, Phlégethon, Acheron and Styx.

s.3, 1.3, *His brothers*: Minos, once King of Crete, and Rhádamánthus; they were really half-brothers of Aécus, all three being sons of Zeus but Aécus having a different mother. They were the three judges of the dead.

s.3, 1.3, *The Furies*: they would execute the sentence.

s.3, 1.7, *Ferocious Cerberus*: the three-headed dog of Hades. He was chained to the inside of the door and sprang at the ghosts as they entered. According to Cynthia, however (see the penultimate stanza of iv.7), he was loosed at night.

s.4, 1.8, *This stone declares*: as though the poem were inscribed on the tombstone. Perhaps it was, but it seems too long and not altogether appropriate.

s.5, 1.6, *Sit at my side*: the accused's supporters in Rome sat with him at his trial.

s.5, 1.14, *Godlike tears*: the Emperors were worshipped as gods in the provinces, mainly for political reasons, and especially in countries accustomed to the notion of divine men; but Augustus had forbidden such worship in Rome. The poets, however, sometimes allowed themselves a certain licence and no doubt Augustus did not view these lapses too unfavourably. See also the first line of iii.iv.

s.5, l.16, *To his daughter a worthy sister*: strictly a half-sister. She was Julia, who at a later date was to fall into deep disgrace.

s.6, l.5, *My brother*, etc.: Publius Cornelius Scipio, consul in 16 B.C., which must therefore be the date of Cornelia's death and of this poem.

s.6, l.10, *Let my boat set sail*, etc.: i.e., across the Styx.

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The Poems of Propertius

Translated, with an Introduction and Notes,
by Ronald Musker

With an appendix on the pronunciation of proper names, and indexes to the notes, titles and first lines

Propertius was one of the great poets of ancient Rome, fortunate enough to enjoy, together with Virgil and Horace, the patronage of the emperor Augustus's counsellor Maecenas. In this distinguished literary circle he was remarkable for his resistance to the pressure to write patriotic poems glorifying the regime. Instead he chose, in his sophisticated poetry, to make Rome's imperial ventures simply a backdrop to his now famous love-affair with Cynthia. And although the fourth book deals mainly with Roman legend and history, it is by these love poems that he is remembered; in spite of the unromantic environment in which the affair is set, the poems frankly describing it are charged with a strange and passionate romanticism.

Because Propertius' language is difficult, frequently flouting convention, his literary powers have often been overlooked, and translators have been discouraged. This new verse translation by Ronald Musker is in straightforward modern English through which Propertius may speak for himself to the audience of today. Mr Musker has added a long, authoritative Introduction and full explanatory Notes.

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